**By Soliman M. Santos, Jr. and Paz Verdades M. Santos**
*with* Octavio A. Dinampo, Herman Joseph S. Kraft,
Artha Kira R. Paredes, and Raymund Jose G. Quilop

Edited by Diana Rodriguez

# PRIMED AND PURPOSEFUL

## ARMED GROUPS AND HUMAN SECURITY EFFORTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

small arms survey

A joint publication of the South-South Network for Non-State Armed Group Engagement and the Small Arms Survey

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*Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines* provides the political and historical detail necessary to understand the motivations and probable outcomes of conflicts in the country. The volume explores related human security issues, including the willingness of several Filipino armed groups to negotiate political settlements to the conflicts, and to contemplate the demobilization and reintegration of combatants into civilian life. Light is also shed on the use of small arms—the weapons of choice for armed groups—whose availability is maintained through leakage from government arsenals, porous borders, a thriving domestic craft industry, and a lax regulatory regime.

—**David Petrasek,** Author, *Ends and Means: Human Rights Approaches to Armed Groups* (International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2000)

At the centre of this book are the 'primed and purposeful' protagonists of the Philippines' two major internal armed conflicts: the nationwide Communist insurgency and the Moro insurgency in the Muslim part of Mindanao. Steeped in first-hand knowledge of the conflicts and containing the most detailed, insider-informed group profiles available, this book offers a deeper understanding of the country's many armed groups—from the ideologically driven and militarily strong to the opportunistic and criminal. This volume argues that while these non-state armed groups and their offshoots are undoubtedly part of the human security problem in the Philippines, they must also be part of the solution.

—**Introduction,** *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts*

**Front cover images (left to right):** Members of the New People's Army celebrate the 39th founding anniversary of the Communist Party of the Philippines, Surigao del Sur, 26 December 2007. © Reuters; and Mujihideen of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front at prayer in their base command camp in Maguindanao province. © Arthur C. Fuentes/SSN

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Armed Group Engagement and the Small Arms Survey

small
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# About the South–South Network for Non-State Armed Group Engagement (SSN)

SSN is a young and fledgling region-anchored initiative from the global South that seeks to gather, share, study, develop, and promote more effective approaches, instruments, and intellectual resources for the constructive engagement of non-state armed groups (NSAGs). It adopts a Southern perspective in its contextual approach to NSAG engagement and in its organizational configuration and culture. At present a small and loose but dynamic inter- and intra-regional network of NGO field practitioners and academics, it is developing as a specialist vehicle to undertake and assist Southern and international efforts to constructively engage NSAGs in a wide range of areas. Its areas of expertise and intervention include human rights and humanitarian law, conflict resolution and peace building, human security and development, democratization and good governance, and the issue of terrorism.

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# About the Small Arms Survey

The Small Arms Survey is an independent research project located at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. Established in 1999, the project is supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and by sustained contributions from the Governments of Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The Survey is also grateful for past and current project support received from the Governments of Australia, Denmark, France, New Zealand, Spain, and the United States, as well as from different United Nations agencies, programmes, and institutes.

The objectives of the Small Arms Survey are: to be the principal source of public information on all aspects of small arms and armed violence; to serve as a resource centre for governments, policy-makers, researchers, and activists; to monitor national and international initiatives (governmental and non-governmental) on small arms; to support efforts to address the effects of small arms proliferation and misuse; and to act as a clearinghouse for the sharing of information and the dissemination of best practices. The Survey also sponsors field research and information-gathering efforts, especially in affected states and regions. The project has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies, and sociology, and collaborates with a network of researchers, partner institutions, non-governmental organizations, and governments in more than 50 countries.

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# Preface

The idea for this publication arose during a discussion in November 2005 between the Small Arms Survey and the South–South Network for Non-State Armed Group Engagement on the newly released Small Arms Survey book, *Armed and Aimless: Armed Groups, Guns, and Human Security in the ECOWAS Region*. Whereas that volume explores the opportunism of members of various armed groups that torment countries in West Africa—as evidenced by fluid allegiances and ideologies that shift to suit personal, short-term interests—a book on armed groups in the Philippines, it was suggested, would offer a different perspective on armed groups.

In the first place, by focusing on a single country, this volume is able to provide the political and historical detail necessary to understand the motivations and probable outcomes of conflicts that, in some cases, are more than four decades old. Second, the most significant Filipino armed groups have been consistent in their pursuit of political and welfare gains for broad support bases. Several groups have been willing to negotiate political settlements to conflicts, and to contemplate the demobilization and reintegration of combatants into civilian life. These and related human security efforts are examined in this volume.

Small arms are the weapons of choice for armed groups in the Philippines, but they are held and used by a much wider cross-section of society. Leakage from government arsenals, porous borders, a thriving domestic craft industry, and a lax regulatory regime converge in the Philippines to swell levels of gun ownership and gun violence. Research by the Small Arms Survey shows that the civilian small arms holdings in the Philippines rank among the 30 largest in the world. Tallies of shooting deaths of politicians and journalists reveal that the Philippines is among the most dangerous countries in the world to exercise those professions.

As this book was in the final stages of editing in late 2009, its currency was underscored by two major pieces of news from the Philippines. First was the bad news of what has become known as the 'Maguindanao Massacre', arising from the electoral contention between two traditional Moro (Filipino Muslim) political clans. This incident highlighted issues dealt with in the last three thematic chapters of Part I of this book: private armies, a corrupt military and police auxiliaries, and the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms and not-so-light weapons, including those from government arsenals.

Second was the good news of the formal resumption of peace talks between the government and the main Moro rebel group. This peace process, which aims to solve the so-called Moro problem, must now address Moro political warlordism. That certain armed groups—such as the main Moro rebel group—are not only part of the problem but also part of the solution is a key conclusion in this book. This should be considered in any policy review, as may be relevant to the upcoming presidential debates and to the ensuing new presidential administration in the Philippines in 2010.

The South–South Network conducted all the research for the volume; the Small Arms Survey provided research guidance and editorial advice. The authors all live and work in the Philippines; it is their knowledge, expertise, and access to the protagonists of the country's armed conflicts that make this publication a valuable resource for all those engaged with peace processes and human security in the Philippines and beyond.

**Eric G. Berman**
Managing Director, Small Arms Survey

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# Foreword

Four decades of internal conflict in the Philippines have taken their toll. The costs of the war include not only a considerable number of direct conflict deaths and casualties, but also the continuing insecurity that has hampered development efforts, trapping people in poverty. Civilians have suffered most. Violations of human rights and international humanitarian law have been perpetrated by combatants on all sides. The climate of fear created, and the militarization and rule of the gun that accompany conflict, have stood in the way of the ongoing democratization process, begun with such optimism in the 1980s at the end of the Marcos dictatorship.

Small arms and light weapons fuel the violence in the Philippines. They are widely available and, sadly, put to widespread use—not only in combat but in the hundreds of political murders that have taken place this decade. There is an urgent need to address weapons proliferation in the Philippines—and it cannot await the outcome of stop–start peace talks.

This book is therefore both timely and necessary. It provides an objective analysis of the issues underlying the ongoing conflicts, and of the interests and modus operandi of the parties involved. Neither romanticizing nor demonizing the various armed groups, the analysis points to ways to engage these groups with a view to promoting human security. It situates such efforts by providing the historical context, so essential to understanding the motives of the groups and why conflict persists in the Philippines.

This publication arrives at a critical time for the Philippines. History suggests that the run-up to the elections in 2010 will lead to a cyclical heightening of levels of political violence. But the elections also provide an opportunity—a new administration must prioritize peace efforts. To break the current impasse, uncommon levels of political will and candour on all sides of the negotiating table are required.

There are no grounds for despair. Much of the analysis in this publication has been prepared by or is based on research undertaken by local Filipino researchers and activists. The rigour and creativity they have shown in unpacking the problems and proposing solutions proves, to me at least, that solutions can be found, and that Filipino civil society will take the lead in that endeavour. The international community has to date been largely indifferent or hopelessly compromised in its approach to conflicts in the Philippines. It must unite behind these local actors, who have waged a long battle for peace and against the further militarization of their country.

**David Petrasek**
Author, *Ends and Means: Human Rights Approaches to Armed Groups*
(International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2000)

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Additional photographs were taken by Julie S. Alipala, Professor Rommel C. Banlaoi, Redjie Melvic Cawis, EV Espiritu, Arthur C. Fuentes (SSN), Jim Gomez, Kara Patria M. Santos (SSN), Soliman M. Santos, Jr., and Bobby Timonera. Lucian Read was commissioned by the Small Arms Survey in early 2007 to take images of small arms in the Philippines, several of which are reproduced here.

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# List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ABB | Alex Boncayao Brigade |
| ABC | Association of Barangay Captains |
| AHJAG | Ad Hoc Joint Action Group |
| AFP | Armed Forces of the Philippines |
| AJB | Abdurajak Janjalani Brigade |
| AKG | Al-Khobar Gang |
| ALTAS | Alyansang Tapat sa Sambayanan<br>(Alliance Loyal to the People, military rebel group) |
| ARMM | Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao |
| ArmsCor | Arms Corporation of the Philippines |
| AS | Abu Sofia |
| ASG | Abu Sayyaf Group |
| BAF | Bangsamoro Armed Forces |
| BBFI | Bantay Bayan ('Town Watch') Foundation Incorporated |
| BDA | Bangsamoro Development Agency |
| BIAF | Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces |
| BLA | Bungkatol Liberation Army |
| BMA | Bangsa Moro Army |
| BMLO | Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization |
| BMP | Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino<br>(Solidarity of Filipino Workers) |
| BRPC | Bicol Regional Party Committee |
| BSC | Bangsamoro Solidarity Conference |
| BULIF | Bungkatol Liberation Front |

| | |
|---|---|
| CAA | CAFGU Active Auxiliary |
| CAFF | Children associated with fighting forces |
| CAFGU | Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units |
| CAR | Cordillera Administrative Region |
| CARHRIHL | Comprehensive Agreement on Respect Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law |
| CARP | Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program |
| CBA | Cordillera Bodong Administration |
| CCCH | Coordinating Committees on Cessation of Hostilities |
| CHR | Commission on Human Rights |
| COMELEC | Commission on Elections |
| CPA | Cordillera People's Alliance |
| CPLA | Cordillera People's Liberation Army |
| CPP-NPA | Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army |
| CVO | Civilian Volunteer Organizations |
| DAMCOR | Danao Arms Corporation |
| DDR | Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration |
| DI | Darul Islam |
| DILG | Department of Interior and Local Government |
| DPA | Deep penetration agents |
| FED | Firearms and Explosives Division |
| FPA | Final Peace Agreement |
| FSDMFI | Fi Sabilillah Da'wah and Media Foundation, Inc. |
| GA | Government Arsenal |
| GRP | Government of the Republic of the Philippines |
| HKT | Hukbong Khalid Trinidad (Khalid Trinidad Army) |
| IANSA | International Action Network on Small Arms |
| ICFM | Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers |
| ICG | International Crisis Group |

| | |
|---|---|
| ICHDF | Integrated Civilian Home Defense Force |
| IED | Improvised Explosive Device |
| IPFA | Indigenous People's Federal Army |
| IRA | Internal revenue allotment |
| ISAFP | Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines |
| ITDS | Integrated Territorial Defense System |
| JI | Jemaah Islamiyah (Islamic Community) |
| KMM | Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (Malaysian Mujahideen Group/Movement) |
| LGU | Local Government Units |
| MILF | Moro Islamic Liberation Front |
| MIM | Muslim (later Mindanao) Independence Movement |
| MLPP-RHB | Marxista-Leninistang Partido ng Pilipinas-Rebolusyonaryong Hukbong Bayan (Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines-Revolutionary People's Army) |
| MNLF | Moro National Liberation Front |
| MNLF-RG | MNLF Reformist Group |
| MOA-AD | Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain |
| MPCPD | Mindanao People's Congress for Peace and Development |
| NDFP | National Democratic Front of the Philippines |
| NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| NPA | New People's Army |
| OIC | Organization of the Islamic Conference |
| OPAPP | Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process |
| PAG | Partisan armed group |
| PAS | Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (Islamic Party of Malaysia) |
| PCTC | Philippine Center for Transnational Crime |
| PCTFOR | Permit to Carry Firearms Outside of Residence |
| PG | Pentagon Gang |

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|---|---|
| PhilANSA | Philippine Action Network on Small Arms |
| PHP | Philippine Peso |
| PMLP | Partido Marxista-Leninista ng Pilipinas (Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines) |
| PMP-APP | Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino-Armadong Partisano ng Paggawa (Filipino Workers Party-Armed Labor Partisans) |
| PNP | Philippine National Police |
| PPD | Partido Proletaryo Demokratiko (Democratic Proletarian Party) |
| PPW | Protracted People's War |
| PTC | Permit-to-campaign |
| RA | Reaffirmist faction of CPP-NPA |
| RAM-SFP-YOU | Rebolusyonaryong Alyansang Makabansa (Revolutionary Nationalist Alliance)-Soldiers of the Filipino People-Young Officers' Union (military rebel group) |
| RHB | Rebolusyonaryong Hukbong Bayan (Revolutionary People's Army) |
| RJ | Rejectionist faction of CPP-NPA |
| RPG | Rocket-propelled grenade |
| RPM-M/RPA | Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Mindanao (Revolutionary Workers Party of Mindanao)/Revolutionary People's Army |
| RPM-P/ RPA-ABB | Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas (Revolutionary Workers Party of the Philippines)/ Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade |
| RSM | Rajah Solaiman Movement |
| SAGSD | Security Agencies and Guards Supervision Division of the PNP |
| SAS | Small Arms Survey |
| SCAA | Special CAFGU Active Auxiliary |
| SIP | Social Integration Program |
| Southcom | Armed Forced of the Philippines Southern Command |

| | |
|---|---|
| SPP | Sosyalitang Partido ng Paggawa (Socialist Labor Party) |
| SRC | State Revolutionary Committee |
| SRSF | Special Regional Security Forces |
| SSN | South–South Network for Non-State Armed Group Engagement |
| SYP | Sandatahang Yunit Pampropaganda (Armed propaganda units) |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNGA | United Nations General Assembly |
| UNPoA | United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects |
| USD | US dollar |

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**Artha Kira R. Paredes**, from Abra province, studied journalism and media studies at the University of the Philippines in Baguio and Diliman. She is a former Abra correspondent of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and has written extensively on private armies in Abra. She is currently working on a World Bank-funded poverty alleviation project known as KALAHI-CIDSS for the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and is pushing for a resolution to the problems of private armies and political violence in Abra that involves rehabilitation and alternative livelihood opportunities for members of private armies—including child soldiers.

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**Diana Rodriguez** has worked as a writer and editor for a number of NGOs and think tanks in Europe and Latin America. Her interests include human rights, anti-corruption and small arms. She holds degrees in politics and development from the University of Cambridge and the London School of Economics.

Manila slums in the shadow of the skyscrapers
and wealth of Metro Manila, January 2007.
© Lucian Read/Small Arms Survey

# Introduction

## Diana Rodriguez and Soliman M. Santos, Jr.

As this book was in its final stages of preparation, contributing author Professor Octavio Dinampo of Mindanao State University was taken hostage while he guided journalists to meet a leader of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Sulu province in June 2008. Instead of considering him to be among the civilian hostages, security force officials cast suspicions over the possible culpability of Dinampo, a former member of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and now respected academic and peace advocate. He was released ten days later.

Several of the motivations for writing this book are synthesized in this single incident. Most obviously, it shows how active the various armed groups that pepper and in some locations dominate the Philippine social and political landscape are. It also illustrates how blurred battle lines have become: the ASG was immediately blamed, though the perpetrators could have been from any number of kidnap-for-ransom gangs. In addition, it shows how dynamic the conflicts in the Philippines are; even experts make mistakes when calibrating the shifting risks involved in their efforts to gain close knowledge of the conflicts.

The challenges of putting this book together are underscored by several other events as well. Two of the people interviewed for this volume have since been killed: Philippine marines killed ASG leader Khadaffy Janjalani in Sulu in September 2006, just months after he was interviewed for this volume; and the long-standing leader of the Communist New People's Army (CPP-NPA) Bicol region, Sotero Llamas, was summarily executed in his home-town of Tabaco City in Albay province shortly after we interviewed him in March 2006. An interview with National Democratic Front (NDFP) Bicol spokesperson Gregorio Bañares was conducted as the CPP-NPA platoon protecting him monitored the movements of a nearby Army patrol in Camarines Sur province.

## Primary purposes, concepts, and audience

One of the primary aims of this book is to reach a deeper understanding of the many armed groups that operate in the Philippines today. They range from the ideologically driven and militarily strong to the opportunistic and criminal. The main focus of the book is 'non-state armed groups', which the South–South Network for Non-State Armed Group Engagement (SSN) takes to refer mainly to rebel or insurgent groups, i.e. groups that are armed, use force to achieve their political or quasi-political objectives, and are opposed to or autonomous from the state.[1] 'Non-state armed groups' do not include state-controlled militias or paramilitaries, civil defence units, mercenaries, private military and security companies, or proxy armed forces, though these groups are covered in some measure in this publication (see Chapters 7 and 8). The Small Arms Survey offers a slightly different definition of 'armed groups' as 'groups equipped with small arms that have the capacity to challenge the state's monopoly of legitimate [coercive] force' (Berman and Florquin, 2005, p. 1, citing Policzer, 2004). This could include pro-state or para-state armed groups that act autonomously from the state or challenge its monopoly of legitimate coercive force. On either definition, the holding of small arms is axiomatic. Some Filipino rebel groups also carry light weapons such as recoilless rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortars.

At the centre of this book are the protagonists of the country's two major internal armed conflicts: the nationwide Communist insurgency, mainly of the CPP-NPA; and the Moro insurgency in the Muslim part of Mindanao. The latter is represented by the MNLF and the groups it spawned, principally the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)—which has since surpassed it as standard bearer of the Moro cause—and the ASG. These are the 'primed and purposeful' of this book's title. This characterization borrows from Stephanie Koorey's paper (2005), 'Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups in South-East Asia'. The armed groups that this book investigates are for the most part ideologically driven, predictable, and supported by a part of the local population.

The ideological foundations and activist nature of many Filipino armed groups steer the thematic discussions in Part One of this volume. Since the groups are more amenable to constructive engagements in peace processes and other human security endeavours than predatory or opportunistic armed groups would be, we chose to home in on human security *efforts*. While the human security *impact* of the insurgencies is a vital area of study, it has been well documented elsewhere.[2] Thus, the thematic chapters of Part One cover: the various peace processes and negotiations; ceasefires; counter-terrorism; disarmament, demobilization, and integration into the armed forces and police; and small arms control. Philippine armed groups are undoubtedly part of the human security problem in the country; a working hypothesis of this study is that the 'primed and purposeful' non-state armed groups must also be part of the solution.

Among the intended audiences for this book are those people who interact with, affect, or are affected by Philippine armed groups, be they from government, business, or civil society. We hope the academic community—in particular in the fields of conflict and peace studies, sociology, and political science—will also engage with this volume, which is steeped in first-hand knowledge of the conflicts and contains the most detailed, insider-informed group profiles available.

## A tale of two insurgencies

The CPP-NPA conflict is the longest-running Maoist insurgency in the world. Its 'protracted people's war' is aimed at overthrowing the government and replacing it with a socialist-oriented 'national-democratic' system. Since the late 1960s the CPP-NPA has been building up its mass bases in rural areas, while simultaneously setting up organizational support structures in the cities. It has yet to achieve the critical mass of support needed to move beyond the first of its envisaged three phases of war—the strategic defensive.

In contrast to the nationwide Communist conflict, Moro rebels seek control over only a portion of Mindanao, in the southern Philippines. In broad terms, this conflict can be viewed as a clash between two imagined nations, Filipino and Moro, each with its own narratives of war. The Moro insurgents talk of regaining sovereignty over their historic homelands, while for the Philippine government they represent a threat to territorial integrity in an area where they are no longer the majority population. The conflict is currently unfolding along three concurrent paths: the MNLF signed a peace agreement in 1996 which is being implemented—inadequately the group would say; the MILF has been in peace talks with the government since 1997; and the ASG is waging a terror campaign that has made it a target of the post-11 September 2001 United States-led 'global war on terror'.

Though different in aims, strategy, ideology, and geography, the two conflicts are linked. First, the signal year for both is 1968, when President Ferdinand Marcos was three years into his 20-year despotic rule. This was the year when the CPP was re-established as a Maoist party, just a few months before its armed force, the NPA, initiated its war; and when the precursor to the MNLF, the Muslim (later Mindanao) Independence Movement, was formed in response to the 'Jabidah Massacre' of Muslim trainees by their Filipino officers.

Second, both insurgencies derive power and legitimacy from the poverty and disenfranchisement that besets much of the Filipino and Moro populations. More than one-third of the country's 81 million people live under the national poverty line—the poorest of them in Muslim Mindanao—and the country now lags behind its neighbours Thailand and Malaysia in terms of human development and living standards. NPA strongholds tend to be in rural areas bereft of government presence and services, principally in Luzon, Visayas, and non-Muslim (mainly northern and eastern) Mindanao. For the armed groups in Muslim (mainly central and southwestern) Mindanao, poverty and poor governance is compounded by the historic marginalization of Islamized ethno-linguistic 'Moro' groups in their own homeland, with roots dating back to Spanish colonization in the 16th century.

Though recognized by all, the root problems of poverty, poor governance, and injustice were insufficiently addressed by the authoritarian Marcos regime and the debt-ridden governments that succeeded it, some of which have, like Marcos, been accused of corruption. This fuels the anti-government fervour that leads some people to join insurgencies. And at the most basic level of motivation, when poverty strips areas of livelihood opportunities rebel groups represent a source of food and education. Indeed, as discussed in the NPA profile in Part Two, some analysts have found a correlation between the Asian financial crisis of the 1990s and a resurgence of recruits to the group.

A third similarity between the conflicts is their common enemy, the Philippine state. Successive administrations have employed similar tactics on both the Communist and Moro fronts. There have been attempts to defeat the rebels militarily, most notably by Marcos under his brutal martial-law regime (1972–81), but also through the 'all-out' wars against the MILF under Joseph Estrada and currently against the Communist insurgents under President Gloria Arroyo, who in June 2006 pledged at least PHP 1 billion (USD 19.5 million) to the effort. Despite their superior strength—which has been bolstered by a 50,000-strong civilian militia and US technical support offered under the rubric of fighting terrorism—military victory has eluded the security forces and is unlikely in the near future. Economic and psychological tactics have been used in tandem with some success to weaken and divide the insurgents, for instance by buying off or co-opting individual rebel leaders, or by financing development projects that offer alternative livelihoods to combatants.

## Part One: thematic chapters

The common issues outlined above are explored in Part One of this book. It begins with two overview chapters that set out the main actors and issues involved in the Communist and Moro insurgencies, respectively. The chapter on the Communist conflict is followed by a case study of the NPA stronghold in Bicol (Chapter 2), where many of the group's strategies, such as collecting 'revolutionary taxes' and charging for 'permits to campaign' during elections, were devised. Chapter 3, on the Moro front, looks at the three tracks of war and peace with the MNLF, MILF, and ASG, and includes excerpts from a rare extended interview with Mohagher Iqbal, the chairman of the MILF Peace Panel (Box 3.2).

Chapter 4, on terrorism, unpacks the nationally and internationally dominant 'global war on terror' discourse. Central to this discourse is the thesis that there is a South-east Asian terrorist network with direct links to many Filipino rebel groups. This chapter challenges this view and highlights the problems that arise—especially for the peace processes with the main rebel groups—when policy-makers and the security forces collapse insurgents with terrorist groups. A case study on the ASG (Chapter 5)—which has undoubtedly engaged in terror tactics, but is not the Filipino branch of international terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) or al-Qaeda as is posited by the 'war on terror' theorists—rounds out the discussion.

Although there has been no comprehensive disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of any armed group in the Philippines, elements of DDR have been applied in several instances. Chapter 6 looks at early DDR experiences, in particular those involving the indigenous Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA) in the wake of the 1986 peace agreement, and two groups of military rebels who signed a peace agreement with the government in 1995. Several factors militate against successful DDR in the Philippines. For example, the failure of the government to make good on pledges of funds for reintegration and development programmes, and the failure of rebel groups such as the CPLA and MNLF to reinvent themselves as viable political organizations after agreeing to a DDR programme, are precedents that could deter other rebel groups from entering into similar arrangements. Chapter 7 offers a case study of the most extensive DDR experience in the Philippines: the integration of some 7,500 members of the MNLF into the army and police following the 1996 peace agreement.

Not all armed groups in the Philippines are the ideologically driven organizations implied by this book's title. The vast civilian militias affiliated to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippines National Police (PNP) are explored in Chapter 8. Also germane to this chapter are the private armed groups recruited and armed by local business leaders and politicians, and vigilante groups, many of which are anti-Communist and fundamentalist Christian in inspiration. These private or para-state armed groups have been accused of extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations, but remain largely unpunished for their actions. This is partly the result of a poorly functioning judicial system—which those who create 'private armies' say justifies their existence in the first place. But it also suggests complicity between the security forces and their civilian proxies, and shows how the state becomes compromised when its affiliates violate national and international laws. In Chapter 9, an investigative journalist takes a closer look at the 'private armies' of Abra province, where guns rather than votes have shaped the political landscape in recent years.

The final chapter of Part One looks at small arms and light weapons, collating information from myriad sources to provide a picture of public and private holdings. It addresses both the demand for and the supply of weapons. It also dissects the legal and institutional control framework, concluding that its ineffectiveness is due not only to enforcement failings but to flaws in its design, particularly in the area of licensing. The chapter looks, too, at efforts to recover 'loose' (unlicensed) firearms, including amnesties for the general public and buy-back programmes targeting members of private armies, retired or dismissed security forces personnel, or rebel groups (the latter are also discussed in Chapters 6 and 7). Detailed small arms and light weapons data per armed group is also found in Part Two.

## Part Two: group profiles

Part Two comprises detailed profiles of 14 rebel or non-state armed groups in the Philippines. The groups are neither static nor easily classifiable. The profiles provide a snapshot of the groups and are offered as guides to constructive engagement where possible.

Each group profile is divided into five main sections. The first provides the 'Basic characteristics' of the group. Here the 'Current status', 'Origins', 'Leadership', and 'Aims and ideology' of the group are described. The second section, 'Support', provides information about the 'Political base' and 'Combatants and constituency'. Information on levels and sources of financing is included in this section. Section three outlines 'Military activities', including 'Strategy', 'Areas of operation', and 'Military organization'. A fourth section looks at 'Small arms and light weapons', with separate entries on 'Stockpiles', 'Sources', and 'Recoveries'. The 'Stockpiles' subsection records weapons in the inventories of the armed groups. The 'Sources' subsection notes how these groups received their weapons, addressing both domestic and foreign sources. The subsection on 'Recoveries' looks at gun buy-backs, amnesties, and seizures by security forces, where relevant. The fifth section looks at 'Human security' issues under the categories of 'Human rights abuses', 'Displacement', 'Children affiliated with fighting forces', and 'Gender'. Each profile ends with a summary of the 'Outlook' for the group, which includes details about its capacity for negotiation.

We realized there was a need for basic as well as more detailed information on these groups when we observed that some rebel groups did not even know of the existence of other rebel groups. Political activists and analysts have also confessed to confusion about the 'alphabet soup' of armed groups, especially among the various Communist break-away factions and their respective armed wings.

The groups featured are those mentioned above: the MNLF, MILF, and ASG on the Moro or Muslim front in Mindanao, and the mainstream CPP-NPA and five splinter groups on the Communist front, including the indigenous CPLA. Also represented are recently emerged local jihadi group Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM), and the armed groupings of the indigenous Lumad tribes in Mindanao. Two profiles in the Moro section refer to groups that are actually beyond this book's intended parameters for Philippine non-state armed groups: JI, the leading *foreign* jihadi group with a current presence in the Philippines; and the Pentagon Gang, a kidnap-for-ransom group. In the former case, the profile focuses on the nature and extent of the operations of JI and other Indonesian and Malaysian jihadi groups in the Philippines, and their ties to local armed groups. The Pentagon Gang is included because it has been mistakenly included in the US terrorist list, many of its leaders are former rebel combatants, and it shares areas of operations with rebel groups.

The quality of the detailed information in these group profiles of course depends on the quality of the sources of information, which brings us to the crucial matter of research methodology.

## Research methodology, perspectives, and constraints

The study was undertaken jointly by the Small Arms Survey and SSN, with the latter doing most of the in-country research. For the Part Two group profiles, SSN placed a premium on primary sources and local knowledge, including field and prison interviews with rebel leaders and documents issued by the non-state armed groups themselves. SSN felt strongly that the perspective of the armed groups that are the subject of this book should be represented among the sources consulted, notwithstanding the problems of access and trust this posed.

Information from rebel groups was balanced and cross-checked against other perspectives and sources, including from the military intelligence community. Military and police intelligence sources are also problematic, however, not least because documents are often difficult to access. Some information is classified and other documents are unreliable, such as the confessions and debriefings of captured or surrendered rebels or 'deep penetration agents' since the late 1960s, which may have been extracted under coercion.

Specialized reports—notably those of the International Conflict Group—were valuable, in particular for verifying information. The Small Arms Survey commissioned Jane's Strategic Advisory Services to prepare a report on Philippine non-state armed groups, which was especially useful for data on small arms and light weapons.

Similar sources informed Part One of this volume, though the perspectives of the authors are more salient throughout the thematic chapters of the book. The authors are local experts with first-hand knowledge of conflict areas. All are from the SSN network, which is multidisciplinary and incorporates academic and practitioner perspectives. The SSN champions the viewpoints of civil society and affected local communities from the regions of internal and intra-state armed conflicts in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It aims to situate conflicts in their wider political, economic, social, cultural, religious, ideological, and often post-colonial contexts.

The book privileges macro-level analysis of the armed groups and conflicts covered, though the micro level is considered in the case studies on private armies in Abra province, the MNLF and ASG developments in Sulu province, and the NPA in Bicol.[3] It does not incorporate many voices from affected local communities or even of the mass base of the armed groups in question, which other researchers are beginning to capture.[4] The analysis is selective in terms of the relationships—supportive or antagonistic—of the armed groups with other groupings. In the case of the Moro conflict, for instance, there are at least three interrelated lines of conflict: between the state and the rebel groups; between the rebel groups and local political clans; and among feuding clans. This book deals mainly with the first of these, leaving the treatment of local political clans to other publications or future research.[5]

As the opening paragraphs indicate, research for this book began in the first half of 2006. It was initially envisioned as a six-month project, but the rigours of peer review and the editing process, along with competing projects and deadlines, caused numerous delays. Inevitably, given the long gestation of this volume, updating was necessary to keep pace with the dynamic conflicts. During 2006–08 a new fissure appeared in the Communist breakaway faction Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas (RPM-P); the MNLF factions were reconfigured from four to two; and several key ASG and CPLA leaders were killed or died. The corresponding sections of the group profiles were updated between August and October 2008 to reflect these and other developments. Several of the chapters in Part One were amended via epilogues that reflect on significant developments in the second half of 2008. US dollar conversion rates are all as of 1 September 2008, when most of the material was updated, unless otherwise indicated.

## Current relevance at a critical juncture

This book comes at a critical time. Expectations are high that conflict will be brought to a close in this, the fifth, decade of the two main insurgencies. Yet in August 2008 fighting erupted on the border of Maguindanao and North Cotabato provinces after the Philippine Supreme Court—acting on petitions filed by local leaders of affected Christian communities—blocked a controversial interim agreement on ancestral domain between the government and MILF. In doing so it virtually closed the door on what appeared to be a real chance for a negotiated political settlement of the Moro conflict. This most promising human security effort dating back to 1997, when a peace process and ceasefire were initiated, unravelled in a matter of days.

The government subsequently announced a new peace policy which moves away from peace negotiations with armed groups to direct 'authentic dialogues' with affected local communities and is centered on ending or rejecting all forms of armed struggle. Any future engagement with armed groups is to be framed within the context of DDR. The implication is that negotiations will be resumed only if MILF first disarms—an impossibility as far as the group is concerned.

The crucial policy question remains whether the 'primed and purposeful' armed groups of the Philippines will be constructively engaged as part of the solution to the country's human security problems. For this to happen, both the government and the groups themselves will have to demonstrate exceptional levels of political will, sincerity, and constitutional creativity. ■

## Endnotes

1 This builds on the definition of 'armed groups' as 'groups that are armed and use force to achieve their objectives and are not under state control', in International Council on Human Rights Policy (2000, p. 5).

2 See PHDR, 2005. One of the main authors of that report, Soliman M. Santos, Jr., is a lead author of this book. The report succinctly defines 'human security' as 'the security of real people' which 'consists of the freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from humiliation', so 'that people can make those choices [for their development] safely and freely.'

3 One scholar on armed groups and civil wars who speaks of those two levels in the study of civil wars, and criticizes the current emphasis on macro-dynamics, is Stathis N. Kalyvas (2006, pp. 389–91). Jeremy M. Weinstein (2007, pp. 339–40) also advocates moving beyond cross-country studies towards investigations of the micro-politics of civil wars. Thomas M. McKenna (1998) studies the Moro rebellion led by the MNLF and MILF from the viewpoint of their ordinary rank-and-file adherents rather than their leaders.

4 Jennifer M. Keister, Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, San Diego is working on this dimension of the conflict. Rosanne Rutten (2008) has a chapter on the views of NPA fighters among civilians in Ifugao, a province in the indigenous Cordillera mountain region.

5 In Muslim Mindanao especially, the mapping of Philippine and Moro armed groups could be usefully correlated with a mapping of local clans and kinship and extended family networks. See Randy David (2007).

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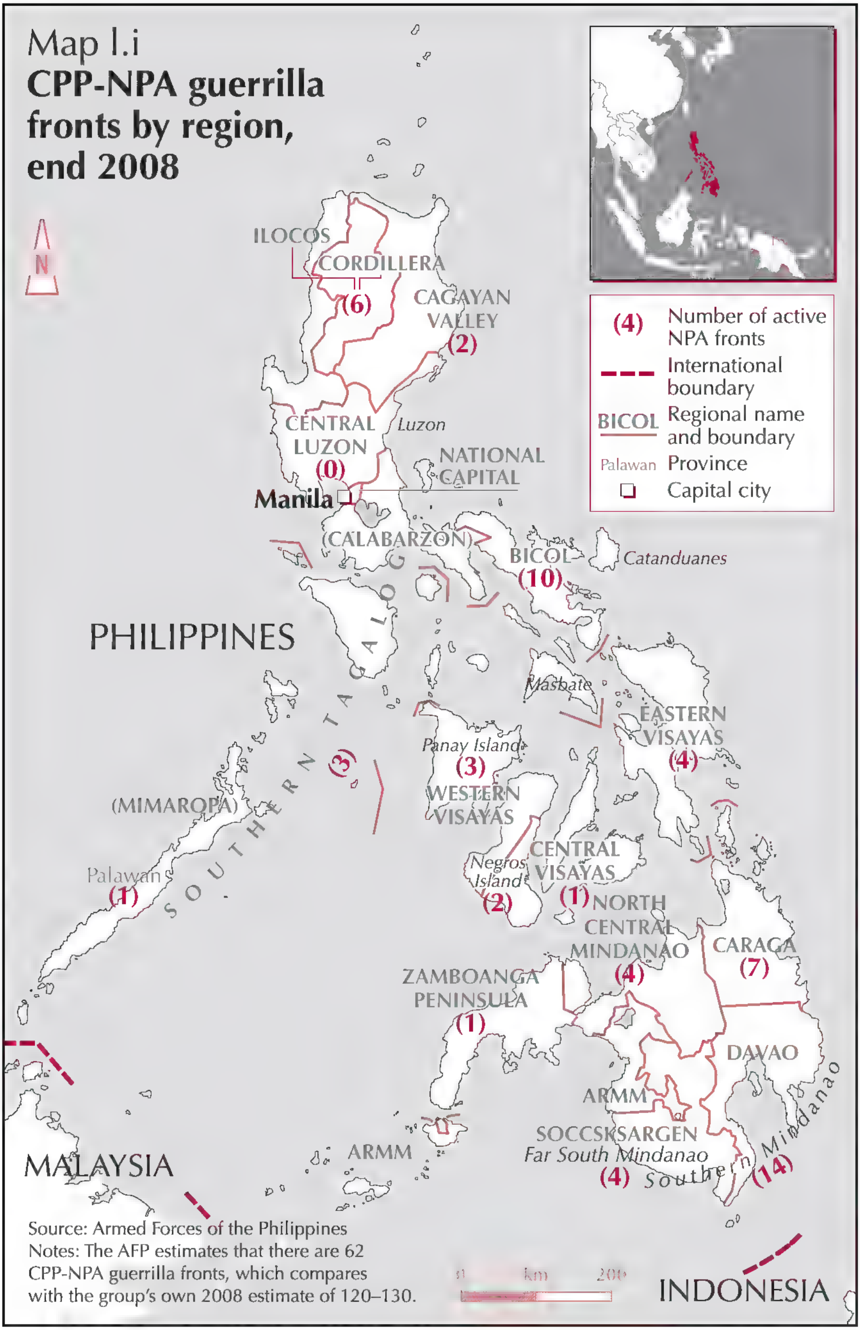
Map I.i

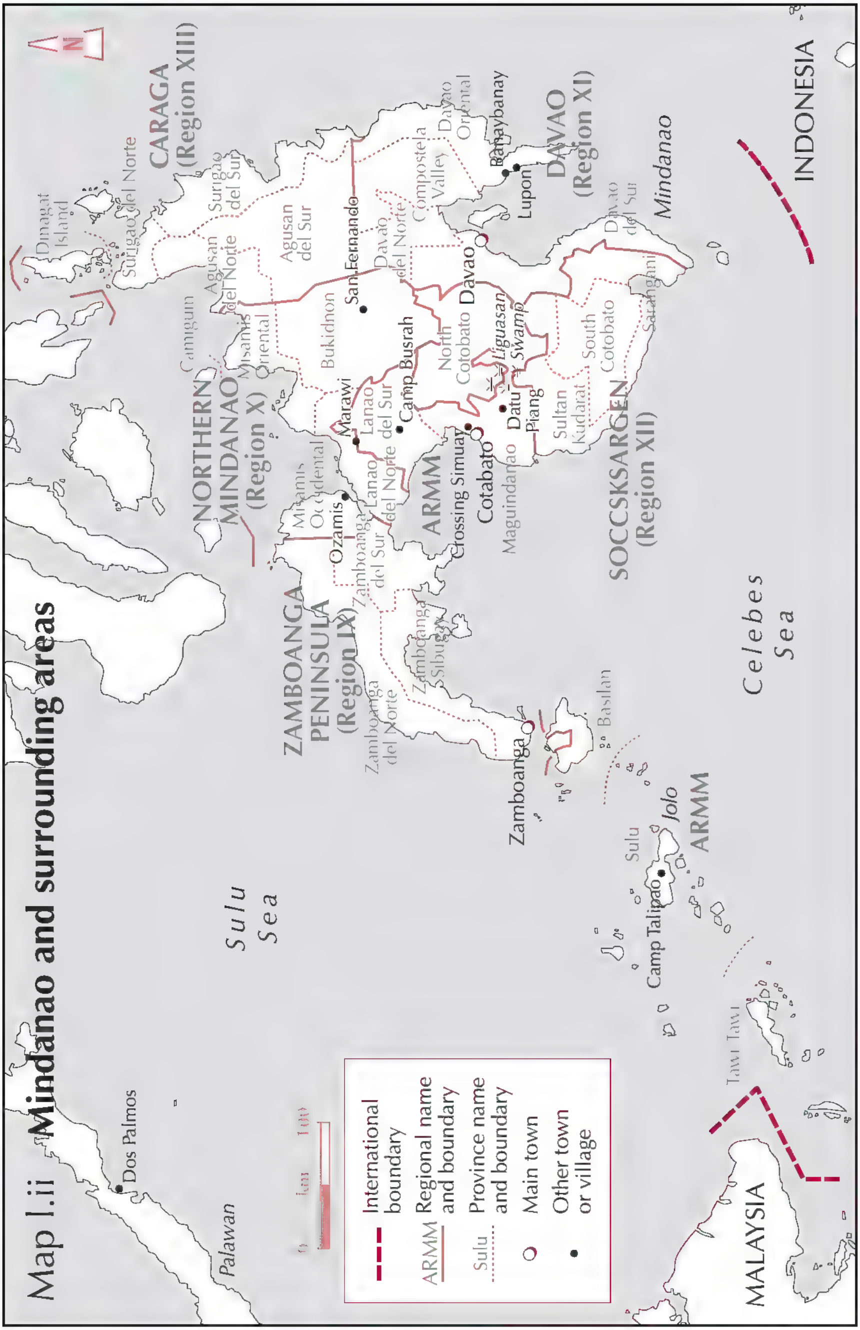
**CPP-NPA guerrilla fronts by region, end 2008**


N
ILOCOS
CORDILLERA
(6)
CAGAYAN VALLEY
(2)
CENTRAL LUZON
(0)
Luzon
NATIONAL CAPITAL
Manila
(CALABARZON)
BICOL
(10)
Catanduanes
PHILIPPINES
SOUTHERN TAGALOG
(3)
(MIMAROPA)
Palawan
(1)
Masbate
EASTERN VISAYAS
(4)
Panay Island
(3)
WESTERN VISAYAS
Negros Island
(2)
CENTRAL VISAYAS
(1)
NORTH CENTRAL MINDANAO
(4)
CARAGA
(7)
ZAMBOANGA PENINSULA
(1)
DAVAO
ARMM
ARMM
SOCCSKSARGEN
Far South Mindanao
(4)
Southern Mindanao
(14)
MALAYSIA
INDONESIA
0 km 200
(4) Number of active NPA fronts
International boundary
BICOL Regional name and boundary
Palawan Province
Capital city

Source: Armed Forces of the Philippines

Notes: The AFP estimates that there are 62 CPP-NPA guerrilla fronts, which compares with the group's own 2008 estimate of 120–130.

Map I.ii Mindanao and surrounding areas


N
Dos Palmos
Palawan
Sulu Sea
MALAYSIA
Tawi Tawi
Camp Talipao
Jolo
Sulu
ARMM
Zamboanga
Basilan
Celebes Sea
INDONESIA
Mindanao
ZAMBOANGA PENINSULA (Region IX)
Zamboanga del Norte
Zamboanga Sibugay
Zamboanga del Sur
Ozamis
Misamis Occidental
NORTHERN MINDANAO (Region X)
Camiguin
Misamis Oriental
Lanao del Norte
Marawi
Lanao del Sur
Camp Busrah
Bukidnon
San Fernando
ARMM
Crossing Simuay
Cotabato
Maguindanao
Datu Piang
Liguasan Swamp
North Cotabato
Sultan Kudarat
South Cotabato
Sarangani
SOCCSKSARGEN (Region XII)
Davao
Davao del Norte
Davao del Sur
Davao Oriental
Compostela Valley
Lupon
Banaybanay
DAVAO (Region XI)
Agusan del Norte
Agusan del Sur
Surigao del Norte
Surigao del Sur
Dinagat Island
CARAGA (Region XIII)
0 km 100
International boundary
ARMM Regional name and boundary
Sulu Province name and boundary
Main town
Other town or village

# Part One

# THEMATIC CHAPTERS

‘Only in the Philippines do state failure, chronic insurgency, and proliferating ties between local and foreign terrorists come together in a lethal cocktail. Combined with a restive military and an impotent administration, the country has become Southeast Asia’s weakest link in the war on terror.’ (Collier and Cook, 2006)

‘So long as we insist on seeing the Mindanao conflict primarily through the lenses of the global war on terror, we will never grasp the complex reality of the struggle for an independent Moro homeland. Every administration oscillates between war and appeasement in a bid to corrupt, divide and break the Moro rebellion.’ (David, 2007)

## CHAPTER 1

# The Communist Front: Protracted People's War and Counter-insurgency in the Philippines (Overview)

Paz Verdades M. Santos

## Introduction

The armed conflict on the Communist front is the longest-running Maoist insurgency in the world (Corpus, 1989, pp. 27–28). Led by the New People's Army (NPA)—the armed force of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which was re-established as a Maoist party on 26 December 1968—it was launched on 29 March 1969 in Central Luzon. Its primary task is 'to wage a *protracted people's war*' (PPW) to overthrow the government and replace it with a 'national democratic' system with a socialist perspective. It is a 'people's war' because, together with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP)—formed in 1973 as an umbrella for its mass organizations—the rebels aim to win over the majority of the population in overthrowing the status quo. It is 'protracted' because they recognize that it will take time to build bases in the countryside before they can eventually take the cities and seize power. There are three major stages in this PPW: the strategic defensive, the strategic stalemate, and the strategic offensive. The PPW has been in the strategic defensive stage since the late 1960s.

Though it wages a 'people's war', the NPA is essentially a political rather than a military force. Aside from armed struggle, its primary tasks are mass base building and land reform. Its strategy is to set up *barangay* (village) organizing committees and barangay revolutionary committees, primarily in rural areas (see Chapter 2), and to build support infrastructure in urban areas through sectoral and other mass organizations. With enough rebel-influenced villages in the countryside, the NPA's ultimate goal is to encircle the cities where the support forces await them to form a coalition transitional council that will eventually become an alternative 'national democratic' government (Marks, 1996, pp. 98–106).

This chapter presents a brief survey of the root causes of this internal armed conflict and provides an overview of its evolution, showing how political changes at various junctures have influenced the war. One political mechanism of particular interest is the peace negotiations of 1986–7, which have continued intermittently since 1992. Prospects for a comprehensive agreement between the government and the NPA are bleak since the government remains firmly opposed to what it views as demands for power sharing, while the CPP is committed to its deeply ideological vision.

The chapter also looks at the longevity of the armed group, which has persisted despite changes in the national and international contexts, and a deep split within the party in the early 1990s. As a result of the split, sections of the Communist Left have explored alternative paths to progressive social and political change, including participation in elections. These other paths necessarily have some bearing on the evolution of the conflict on the Communist front.

Since 11 September 2001, the US-led 'global war on terror' has impinged upon peace negotiations and, of course, on the armed conflict itself. The chapter concludes with some insights on the human security and development panorama, asking whether and how the armed conflict can be resolved peacefully. It also highlights the role of the gun in the insurgency. Following this chapter is a case study of the NPA in Bicol (Chapter 2), a region where the NPA is particularly strong. The study looks at how the group operates in practice, providing details of its organizing and fund-raising techniques.

The key findings of this chapter include:

- The quality and number of cadres has decreased since its heyday in the mid-1980s, but the NPA is still attracting members, mainly poor people from rural areas, for many of whom the NPA represents one of the few available livelihood opportunities. Idealistic college students continue to join, though in much smaller numbers than in the 1970s.
- Though suspended at present, peace talks could be resumed, but the potential for compromise on either side is slim. The NPA's aim is still to overthrow

the government, a demand that leaves little room for negotiation. The Arroyo government has invested in defeating the group militarily.

- The United States, as part of its war on terror, has injected new fuel into the government's anti-insurgency drive, both by listing NPA as a terrorist group and by offering logistical support to the military.
- The direction of conflict is dependent on the quality of democracy. If an inclusive, participatory democracy can be established, then the NPA's struggle will seem anachronistic to its potential supporters and members. Neither the government nor the NPA is likely to win a military victory.

## Causes of armed conflict

The power of the CPP-NPA-NDFP framework is that it helps to simplify and make sense of society's problems. Through the years, and despite changes of government, its analysis of the nation's ills continues to appeal to people who may not have access to more complex and sophisticated study (Caouette, 2004, p. 696). The CPP-NPA-NDFP has identified the three basic problems of the Filipino people as the land problem of the peasantry, US foreign intervention, and 'bureaucrat capitalism'. The latter is defined by CPP founder Jose Maria Sison ('Amado Guerrero') as government officials who serve the interests of the exploitative landlords, capitalists, and imperialists (Guerrero, 1979, pp. 112–15).

The Philippine government and military analyses of the root causes of the nation's problems are broadly consonant with the CPP's. The National Unification Commission Report to President Fidel V. Ramos in 1993 identified poverty and inequity, poor governance, injustice, and exploitation and marginalization of indigenous cultural communities as root problems. Perceived foreign intervention in domestic affairs, degeneration of moral values, and ideological differences in achieving social changes are other factors (National Unification Commission, 1993, p. 27).

The debt-ridden—and in some cases allegedly corrupt—governments of President Ferdinand Marcos (1965–86) and his successors have failed to address these root problems of poverty, poor governance, and injustice.[1] The Philippines was 84th among 177 countries on the United Nations Development

Programme Human Development Index in 2005 (PHDR, 2005, p. 97) with 25.7 per cent of its 81 million people living under the national poverty line in 2003 (PHDR, 2005, p. 108). Patronage politics persists (Castañeda, 2006), especially in rural areas.

The government's failure to provide democracy and justice to the people has given the CPP-NPA-NDFP some grounds for its PPW to establish what it claims will be a liberating nationalist and democratic government. The CPP rationalizes the existence of the NPA by claiming that it protects the people from the 'mercenaries of a fascist elitist' government and the plundering of traditional local politicians. In Sison's words, '[w]e should be able to see the high cost of the violence of daily exploitation to recognize the necessity and lower cost of armed revolution' (Rosca, 2004, p. 201).

Of course, without the CPP-NPA's agitation, the armed conflict would not exist. The government tends to point to the Communists as the root cause of the problem, because they exploit conditions of poverty, block government efforts at development (Cruz, Avelino Jr. 2006), and foist their ideology on the people (Abinales, 1996). The picture is more complex than this analysis of 'outside agitators' exploiting root problems would suggest, however. Guerillas cannot exist without the willing and active support of a majority, or at least a strong minority, of people in the countryside. As the accompanying case study (Chapter 2) shows for the island provinces of Catanduanes and Masbate in the Bicol region, poor areas that are bereft of government presence and services provide fertile terrain for guerilla warfare.

## Reaffirming the PPW

Major political changes in the Philippines mark ebbs and flows in the Communist insurgency, but there have also been clear trends: a gradual rise during the Marcos government (1965–86), a period of relative decline during the Aquino (1986–92) and Ramos (1992–98) governments, and a slow but consistent recovery since 1995.

The 1960s and 1970s were decades of student activism across the globe, and the Philippines was no exception. Students of Marx and Mao in the University of the Philippines and other private colleges and universities were drawn particularly to the perceived logic, purity, and success of the Maoist revolution in China in an era of romanticized national liberation movements. They joined peasants, workers, and sectors of the middle class in a protest movement for reform and democracy (Wurfel, 1988).

In 1970, shortly after the foundation of the CPP and NPA, the 'First Quarter Storm' student demonstrations erupted. Marcos's hard-line response—in particular the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus and, in 1972, the declaration of martial law—inadvertently served the NPA's recruitment drive. Even after CPP founder Sison and NPA commander Bernabe Buscayno were captured in 1976–77, the national democratic movement expanded through massive organization, intensification of guerilla warfare in the countryside, international solidarity work, and alliance-building with groups and individuals who opposed the dictatorship. Following 13 years of martial law, in 1985 the CPP proclaimed that it was in the 'advance substage of the strategic defensive'. In other words, the CPP thought it was close to winning its PPW (CPP, 1993, pp. 35–36, 44; PHDR, 2005, p. 85).

The panorama shifted for the group in 1986, when Corazon Aquino rose to power by virtue of an aborted military coup and the EDSA 'People Power' uprising.[2] Political prisoners were released—among them Sison—peace talks were in the offing, and a ceasefire was declared. But the Communist rebels were unimpressed with the quality of the restored democracy on the grounds that it was as elitist as it had been pre-Marcos, and were unhappy at calls for the group to surrender. Talks collapsed after the military brutally dispersed and killed peasants rallying for land reform in Manila in 1987, and the NPA returned to arms. Aquino, acting under the advice of the United States, launched a 'total war' against the NPA, then at its peak of strength (May and Collier, 2004, p. 406). The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) established *Oplan Lambat Bitag* (literally 'net trap') of 'gradual constriction' in 1988, which succeeded in reducing the Communist force from 25,200 in 1987 to 14,800 in 1991 (Barabicho, 2003; Hernandez, 2006) through a combination of military offensives and efforts to address the political, economic, and social causes of the conflict.

But it was not only external factors that weakened the NPA in this period. The group was undermined by internal ideological disagreements about tactics, starting with the decision not to participate in the successful EDSA protests and the CPP's boycott of the January 1986 snap presidential election. Also damaging to the NPA were the brutal purges of the 1980s when combatants in Mindanao and southern Luzon—most of them innocent—were tortured and killed on suspicion of being military 'deep penetration agents' (DPA). This 'anti-DPA' campaign demoralized and ultimately divided the ranks, and the memory of its horrors continues to haunt the CPP. A split in the group became inevitable after Sison initiated a 'Second Great Rectification Movement'. The main group 'reaffirmed' (RA) Sison's PPW and redeployed the NPA to recover its mass base in the countryside. Membership of its mass base had been reduced by almost 60 per cent and the number of barangays[3] covered by guerilla fronts by 15 per cent, while NPA strength and tactical offensives continued on a steady decline from 1992, bottoming out in 1995.

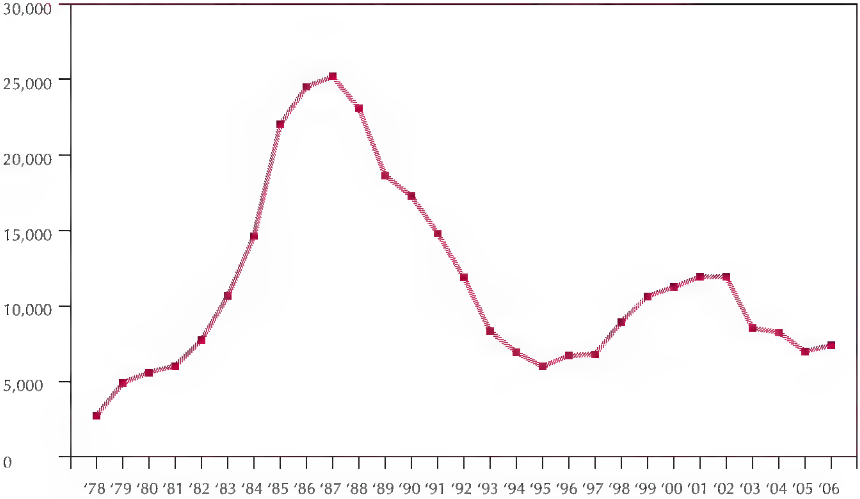
The 'rejectionists' (RJs) who were expelled or who resigned from the party decried the Sison faction's 'Stalinism' and rejected its analysis of Philippine society as being semi-colonial and semi-feudal. They saw a greater role for legal parliamentary struggle and insurrectionism in the Philippine revolutionary project, since by this time the looser post-martial law structure had provided some democratic space for peaceful protest, and newly elected President Ramos had initiated a comprehensive peace process (Caouette, 2004, p. 594). Some rejectionist splinter groups formed their own parties, continued with armed struggle in their own territories, or invested in peace negotiations, parliamentary struggle, trade unionism, NGOs, people's organizations, cooperatives, and other legal means of struggle for reforms.

Further splintered since 1992, RJ groups now have relatively small mass followings and are prone to demobilization and co-option by the government. Some of these groups are involved in peace talks with the government while others are still at war with both the AFP and the CPP-NPA. Attempts have been made to bridge the rift among the splinter groups—most significantly a 'Democratic Left' (DemLeft) dialogue in early 2006—but unity between RA and RJ forces is highly unlikely, given RA hostility. [See Part Two profiles of the following rejectionist groups: Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas (Revolutionary Workers Party of the Philippines) and its Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPM-P/RPA-ABB); Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Muindanao (Revolutionary Workers Party of Mindanao) and its Revolutionary People's Army (RPM-M/RPA); Partido Marxista-Leninista ng Pilipinas (Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines) and its Partisano (Partisans) Group (PMLP-Partisano); Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines and its Rebolusyonaryong Hukbong Bayan (Revolutionary People's Army) (MLPP-RHB); Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino (Filipino Workers Party) and its Armadong Partisano ng Paggawa (Armed Partisans of Labor) (PMP-APP).

Starting in 1995, the military noted a resurgence of the NPA (Barabicho, 2003). In 1997, the CPP stated that it had recovered its 1983 mass base level. The CPP attributed its resurgence to Sison's 'reaffirmation' of the PPW and to the NPA's focus on 'mass work'. The AFP put the rise down to the repealing of the Anti-Subversion Act (Republic Act 1700), which legalized the CPP,[4] and to a shift from intelligence work aimed at defeating the NPA military to economic development to win over supporters of the insurgents. It also accused newly elected congressmen and women with alleged ties to the Communists of using congressional budgets and salaries to fund activities such as street demon-

Male and female NPA combatants take part in a training drill. © NDFP-Bicol

Figure 1.1
**Trend in CPP-NPA strength nationwide, 1978–2006**



**Source:** Esperon (2006)

strations organized by the CPP-NPA-NDFP, and the purchase of small arms (Barabicho, 2003, p. 49; Pante, 2003, pp. 10–11).

In 2001, the AFP estimated that the NPA had recovered almost half of its peak strength. Both Estrada and—after he was ousted in 2001 by a public uprising—his successor Gloria Macapagal Arroyo returned to Aquino's approach by declaring all-out war on the Communists, launching a major military campaign against the rebels in 2002.

The Arroyo regime received a boost in 2004, when the United States, the European Union, Britain, Canada, and Australia blacklisted the CPP, the NPA, and Sison for terrorist activities. The NDFP suspended peace talks because it perceived the government as having pushed for the blacklisting of its member organizations (Rosca, 2004, pp. 221–26). Believing that the Arroyo government would soon fall, the CPP decided in August 2005 to reserve peace talks for her successor, and called on the NPA to intensify tactical offensives against her administration. Because the CPP realized that military withdrawal of support was needed to topple Arroyo, it forged a tactical alliance with anti-Arroyo elements in the AFP (see Box 1.1).

## Box 1.1 Military and Communist rebels in 'unthinkable' alliance

The February 2006 plot to oust the Arroyo regime saw an alliance between new military rebels—particularly those organized under the Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan-Makabayang Kawal ng Pilipinas (KAB-MKP, Society of the Children of the People-Patriotic Soldiers of the Philippines)—and the CPP-NPA-NDFP. They agreed on a reform agenda covering foreign policy; land reform and industrialization; elections and a new constitution; and peace and reconciliation in conflict areas.[5] While the reform agenda was not especially novel, what was historic was the alliance between military and Communist rebels who had traditionally been at war with each other.

In fact, among the grievances of the military rebels of 1986–89 was what they saw as the relatively leniency of the government towards CPP-NPA members accused of human rights violations compared with military officers facing similar accusations (Davide Commission Report, 1990, pp. 470–71). In the case of the 'Magdalo group' of military mutineers of July 2003, their grievances included the corrupt sale of government arms and ammunition to Moro and Communist rebels whom they were fighting, which anecdotal evidence suggests has been systemic rather than occasional.[6]

The NPA, following CPP instructions, issued a statement in March 2006 stating 'we do not attack enemy units that show proof of being against the regime' (CPP, 2006b). It also set up the Crispin Tagamolila Movement to conduct revolutionary work within the AFP. This is a new dynamic in the engagement between a non-state armed group and state armed forces, or elements thereof. It also raises questions about the efficacy and lastingness of earlier disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programmes and peace settlements with military rebels (discussed in Chapter 6), as well as the continuing problem of effecting comprehensive security sector reforms.

## Two approaches and a third option

The Philippine government has had basically two responses to the PPW. The first is a military response, through martial law and all-out war. The second is low-intensity conflict involving 'political, economic, and psychological warfare' (Miles and Martin, n.d., p. 2; Carr and McKay, 1989) rather than military action.

As noted above, 14 years of Marcos's martial law and the all-out war approach of succeeding governments not only failed to end the armed conflict but led to its escalation. There are several reasons for this. First, the AFP counter-insurgency strategy has tended to mimic the US strategy of conventional warfare in Vietnam and Iraq, which is unsuited to the guerilla warfare of a persistent, determined, highly mobile, and committed NPA.[7] Second, the AFP has been beset with internal problems such as a lack of coordination on a nationwide scale and a top-heavy bureaucracy (Corpus, 1989, pp. 107–35; Pobre, 2000). Troop vulnerability, inadequate combat intelligence, campaigns of short duration,[8] and failure to engage in a 'battle of hearts and minds' with the NPA support bases were other factors.

Since 11 September 2001, the framing of the counter-insurgency effort as a counter-terrorist war has fuelled the conflict. The historical record of the CPP-NPA's conduct of armed struggle shows that the group has neither as a policy nor as a general practice engaged in terrorism by deliberately targeting civilians. Yet the government continues to categorize the group as 'Communist terrorists' instead of an armed revolutionary movement with a mass base and the 'defining elements of a social movement' (Caouette, 2004, p. 696). This weakens chances for a negotiated political solution. The CPP's response to the blacklisting of the CPP, NPA, and Sison was predictable: a call for 'all-out resistance' against the 'US-directed Macapagal-Arroyo regime' (Sison, 2002).

The second low-intensity approach pioneered by Aquino and consolidated by Ramos was clearly the more effective. Ramos's 'soft approach' combined with the internal purges, the CPP split, the shift of activists to NGOs and the electoral arena, and the collapse of Communism globally left the NPA floundering.

As to a third option of peace negotiations, both the Philippine government and the CPP-NPA-NDFP have been instrumentalist in their approach. The government has tended to use peace talks to pacify and demobilize the NPA to eventually win a military victory over the group, rather than as a long-term tool to effect reforms (Oquist, 2002; 2003). Its peace proposals have involved the use of amnesties, economic support to demobilized combatants, investments in zones of influence, and the offer of political posts to 'buy' insurgents.[9] The CPP in turn has tended to use the peace negotiations for tactical objectives such as recognition of belligerency status and legitimacy against a terrorist listing (Sison, 2004), but always in the service of the PPW strategy (Quimpo, 2006).[10] Peace talks have been scuttled on numerous occasions for various reasons, including acts of aggression by one or other of the parties.

NDFP negotiations came to a productive head in March 1998 at The Hague with a Comprehensive Agreement to Respect Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL). In early 2005, the NDFP rejected a government demand for an interim ceasefire for a limited period to conduct intensive talks.[11] The CPP-NPA-NDFP has lost all hope of a peace process with the Arroyo government. Figure 1.2 shows the rise in the number of incidents initiated by the CPP-NPA in recent years, which contrasts with a decrease in the number of incidents initiated since 2000 by the two main Muslim armed groups, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) (though MILF-initiated incidents increased in 2008).[12] Box 1.2 describes an ongoing peace process with one of the Communist break-away groups, the RPM-M.

### Box 1.2 **GRP–RPM-M: building peace from the grass roots**

The Peace Process between the GRP [Government of the Republic of the Philippines] and the *Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Mindanao* (RPM-M)—formerly the Central Mindanao ‘component’ of CPP-NPA-NDFP—is one of six ongoing parallel peace processes in the Philippines today. What makes it different from the others is its emphasis on the participation of the various *barangays* (villages) and tribes in Mindanao through participatory local consultations aimed at determining and responding to development needs of the communities.

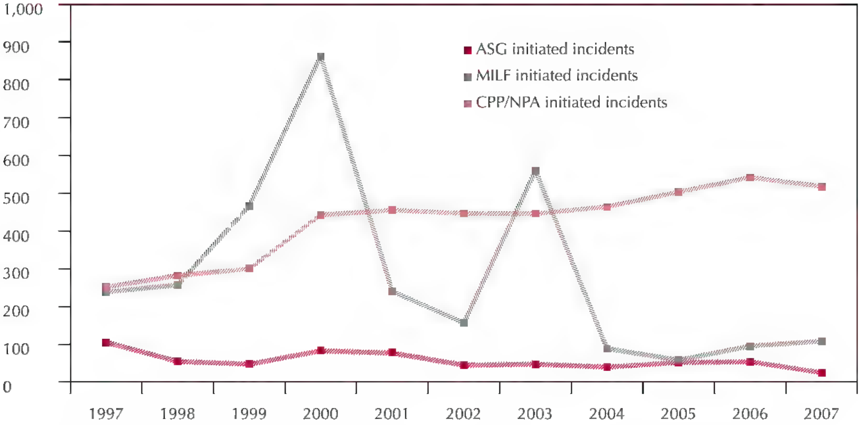
The process started on 19 July 2003, when President Gloria Arroyo created the GRP Panel for Negotiations with the RPM-M. Rather than a process of complex, high-level political negotiations, it aims for a local peace and development agenda that will have an immediate impact on the ground and will be formulated by the communities and tribes of Mindanao. As part of this peace process, a series of *barangay* and community-based consultations in areas with RPM-M presence are being conducted to identify community problems and their solutions—including the controversial issue of land ownership.

The GRP and RPM-M signed the Formal Agreement for the General Cessation of Hostilities on 28 October 2005, thereby institutionalizing the participation of the communities and tribes affected by the conflict. Since then 97 *barangays* (including more than half of the *barangays* within ancestral domain claims) in ten municipalities in five provinces in three regions of Mindanao have been involved in local consultations.

The GRP-RPM-M Peace Process is proving to be a viable model for peace building, especially in these times of political upheaval in the Philippines. Since its life and momentum are not purely dependent on top-level talks, community-level activities can continue in the absence of a permanent Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process. Participants have found that the process has been empowering for the communities involved since it has allowed them to win small victories. The two sides (especially the principals) continue to meet and talk informally and a number of the priority community-based projects identified during the local consultations as integral to the peace process are being implemented with the support of international development agencies. The final resolution to the conflict through a formal peace agreement between GRP and RPM-M is important and has yet to be reached, but peace building is happening along the way.

**Author:** Kaloy Manlupig, President of Balay Mindanaw, Head of the Independent Secretariat, GRP–RPM-M Peace Process

Figure 1.2
**Incidents initiated by the CPP-NPA, MILF, and ASG, 1997–2007**



**Notes:** Incidents include ambuscades, raids, harassment, disarming, use of landmines, killing, kidnapping, robberies and hold-ups, bombing, sabotage, and arson.

**Source of data:** Figures from J2-AFP, Digest 4th Quarter 2006; graph by South-South Network.

## The war goes on

Although the NPA is unlikely to win a military victory, neither is it about to go away. It may well expand in the countryside given the persistence of many of the same conditions that gave birth to it—poverty, injustice, and the lack of government presence and services in remote areas. If the rebels are to gain ground, however, they must convince a good number of Filipinos that waging war for their national democratic alternative is more effective and less costly than traditional political avenues for alleviating poverty, spreading wealth, and seeking justice. If NPA rebels harass people, seek to impose their will, fail to curb tendencies towards centralism and dogmatism, or are perceived to have become new oppressors, they will lose their members and mass base. Filipinos, already distrustful of repressive regimes after martial law, are unlikely to welcome any more rigid regimes, whether elitist or Communist (Mangahas, 1993).[13]

The armed conflict between the CPP-NPA-NDFP and the Philippine government has recently escalated with Arroyo's reiteration of a military solution. Dogged by questions of legitimacy and threatened by military restlessness, the Arroyo government proclaimed a state of national emergency on 24 February

2006—lifted two weeks later—to quell a conspiracy she attributed to a tactical alliance between the CPP-NPA and 'military adventurists' (see Box 1.1). She also bore down on mass protests.

In June 2006, Arroyo called on the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to crush the insurgency in two years, pledging at least PHP 1 billion (USD 19 million) to the effort (Avendaño, 2006).[14] Her government also allotted funds for poverty alleviation and anti-corruption in government (Cruz, Avelino, 2006) and deployed the Philippine National Police (PNP) in counter-insurgency efforts directed against Communist rebels.[15] The AFP has a new three-year internal security strategy called Oplan Bantay Laya II which employs a 'holistic approach', encompassing economic, political, and social as well as military strategies. Meanwhile, death squads continue to assassinate with impunity legal activists and non-combatants identified with the Left, even those who have long left the movement. They have been acting with the complicity or involvement of some sectors of the military, according to a number of organizations, including the government's Melo Commission tasked to investigate the killings, Amnesty International, and UN Special Rapporteur Philip Alston.

Arroyo's all-out war proclamation has been criticized as a ploy to quell military restlessness, since a battle against the Communists will keep the army busy and provide a rationale for distributing awards and largesse to the officers. Yet critics—even among anti-Communists—predict that a purely military solution to the insurgency is not viable (Abaya, 2006; David, 2006). With this move, they say, Arroyo will have achieved the singular distinction of 'reviving Southeast Asia's last communist insurgency' (Tan, 2006).

Caouette concludes that, while the CPP-NPA-NDFP is likely to persevere and even grow in the near future, it will remain a 'marginal actor in Philippine politics because the possibilities to become a central and significant actor over time in any large social coalition are at the moment quite narrow' (Caouette, 2004, p. 699). Nonetheless, current events might create the right mix to result in the 'newer people's army' that Kerkvliet foresaw (Kerkvliet, 1996, p. 26).[16] Although the killings have a chilling effect on legal activists, they also anger human rights advocates, church leaders, and ordinary civic-minded citizens in the Philippines and abroad. The threat to legal venues for activism is driving leftists underground and giving the NPA some grounds to retaliate against

Members of the NPA hike through the rural terrain where they have based their 40-year protracted people's war. © NDFP-Bicol

an authoritarian government. In urban areas, especially in progressive colleges and universities, intellectuals and idealists continue to find in the CPP's ideology a clear, coherent, and realizable alternative to oligarchic politics and the abuses they see around them.

Meanwhile, the CPP-NPA-NDFP has responded to Arroyo's 'all-out war' in kind, with new combat plans in a tit-for-tat struggle with little immediate prospect of a cessation of hostilities. These plans include the deployment of hit squads to target the 'masterminds and operatives' of political killings, and the shooting down of military planes (Sison, 2006; CPP Military Commission, 2006).

The rebels have learned from past mistakes, albeit slowly and at great social cost to their mass base and their own ranks. The CPP was marginalized in EDSA 1, but was a strong force in the popular uprising against President Estrada in 2001. It eschewed parliamentary politics in the 1980s and NGOs in the 1990s, condemning these as illusory and reformist, but is no longer so reluctant to use these venues to support its revolution. Used to working in temporary alliances with other actors, it is now forging ties with anti-Arroyo forces, even among Arroyo's own military.

Peace advocates and civil society groups continue to search for mutually acceptable terms of reference such as human rights, international humanitarian law, and democracy—issues that both sides pay at least lip service to.

They have called on the protagonists to respect the CARHRIHL, as well as local communities' desire for peace zones and environmental zones (Mallari, 2006b).[17] Such independent groups, though visible, remain small and prone to the divisions that beset most social and political organizations in the Philippines, however. They have yet to develop the capacity to mediate in the conflict between the Philippines government and Communist rebel forces and to work for substantive reforms.

### Box 1.3 **The role of the gun**

*'Garand or M-14, AK 47 or M-16/ our carbines will surely hit their mark/ with correct principles as our guide.'* This line from a rebel cultural publication summarizes the role of the gun in the hands of the rebels. The CPP-NPA is engaged in armed struggle to achieve political goals.

The NPA's firearms are mainly seized from AFP and PNP forces engaged in counter-insurgency and their civilian auxiliaries within the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit (see Chapter 8). They are seized primarily through 'annihilative actions', sometimes using command-detonated anti-vehicle landmines which NPA rebels manufacture themselves.[18] One frequent guerilla tactic is the use of command-detonated Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) to first disable a military vehicle, before targeting any surviving soldiers with rifle fire, usually taking care to conserve as much ammunition as possible. Rebels gather as many weapons as they can from the dead or injured after such attacks.[19] They also engage in 'attritive actions' to inflict damage and put their enemy on the defensive through 'sniping, attack-and-retreat units, sapper units, RPGs, mortars and land mines' (CPP Military Commission, 2006).

It is also alleged that two other sources of NPA weapons are military officials or rank-and-file soldiers who sell their guns at low prices in the market.[20] Another source is local politicians who hand over weapons as a form of 'donation' or 'taxation'.

### Table 1.1

## Cost of armed conflict with the NPA

| Indicator | Incidence |
|---|---|
| Armed incidents from 2000 to 2006 | 1,130* |
| Killed and injured in armed encounters from 1986 to 2004 | 3,552 combatants** |
| Killed by the NPA from 2000 to 2006 | 1,227* |
| Displaced from 1986 to 1992 | 1,272,100 individuals or 238,880 families** |
| Income lost from 1986 to 2004 | PHP 2,127.13 million (USD 40.3 million)* |

**Sources:** * Esperon (2006), US dollar rate at 1 June 2006; ** PHDR (2005, p. 10)

## Epilogue (December 2008)

A statement issued on 26 December 2008 to mark the 40th anniversary of the 'reestablishment' of the CPP signals an intensification of the conflict. This most important of the annual policy statements of the CPP is likely to have been written by CPP founder and ideologue Jose Maria Sison, who turned 70 in February 2009.

The statement speaks of a plan for a 'qualitative leap' of the armed revolution, which involves the NPA advancing 'from the stage of strategic defensive and finally to that of the strategic stalemate' in its PPW (CPP, 2008). But before we examine some of the ramifications of this plan, it is interesting to note certain assessments and revelations made by the CPP in the statement. The CPP says that 'all attempts to destroy the armed revolution have failed' and the PPW 'has endured'—quite an achievement, it says, in 'a major base of US imperialist hegemony'.

Yet it reveals that the NPA 'never reached the level of 25,000 riflemen in the 1980s', as was commonly believed based on military intelligence estimates and other public sources. Rather, it says, 'its peak strength in that decade was only 6,100.' At the end of 2008, the CPP says its membership 'runs into several tens of thousands' while the NPA has 'thousands of fighters'—the military intelligence estimate was 4,941 NPA fighters in late 2008. The CPP says 'close to 100 per cent of the weapons in the hands of the NPA have come from its enemy through tactical offensives.' It claims to have a countryside mass base of 'millions of organised peasants' in '120 to 130 guerrilla fronts in 70 provinces, more than 800 municipalities and more than 10,000 barangays'—military intelligence estimates that there are 63 NPA guerrilla fronts and 1,442 NPA-affected barangays.

For the planned 'great leap forward' the CPP says it needs 'tens of thousands of Party cadres and hundreds of thousands and then millions of Party members' (CPP, 2008). Cadres are the leading members of the CPP, its quality backbone force which leads its day-to-day revolutionary work on various fronts, mainly but not only in the NPA guerrilla fronts (Rutten, 2008). While there has been a shift from the early decades when the CPP recruited mainly from the student sector to recruitment from the rural peasantry, in recent years underground recruitment in schools and universities has increased (Uy, 2008).

It remains to be seen whether the CPP can achieve the required critical mass of cadres and other forces for its planned 'qualitative leap' to the strategic stalemate stage of the PPW. The 'overriding objective' of this new push includes 'approach[ing] the goal of destroying the ruling system and replacing it with the people's democratic state.' The plan includes a call to '[d]evelop the guerrilla fronts toward becoming relatively stable base areas.' Quantitatively, the NPA guerrilla fronts 'must be increased to the level of 168', or one per congressional district in all provinces, including Moro provinces. Qualitatively, it seeks:

> *the emergence of relatively stable base areas from the increase, merger, integration or expansion of existing guerrilla fronts under a base area command, capable of launching company-size tactical offensives on the scale of a province or several provinces, if based on an inter-provincial border area.*
>
> *In order to build up these base areas, the CPP must lead the NPA in suppressing and driving away the oppressors and exploiters and dismantling the reactionary organs of political power over extensive areas.*

Note that the latter directive is not just to shadow or compete with but to 'dismantle' political bodies so they can be effectively replaced by revolutionary political organs. The local ruling classes such as the big landlords are to be 'suppressed' and 'driven away' by the NPA to make space for the 'maximum level' of revolutionary land reform whereby peasants organized by the CPP-NPA take over the land. All told, one sees an intensified and accelerated CPP-NPA-NDFP drive to assert what it perceives as its 'status of belligerency'. As has been noted elsewhere, this is a source of considerable violence and coercion being committed in its name.

An escalation of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary violence can be expected in the immediate or near future, as preparations for the 2010 elections get under way. The four-year impasse in the formal peace talks between the GRP and NDFP—for which, true to form, it blames the Arroyo regime—is likely to continue. The CARHRIHL, now more than ten years old, has been prejudiced at a time when it is most needed. A weak civil society peace constituency has had little impact on the combative behaviour of either side in the conflict.

A substantially improved human security effort is needed by all concerned if there is to be a chance even of reducing violence levels, since ending the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary violence is not yet in sight. Humanizing the war is as crucial at this stage as finding solutions to the root causes of the rebellions.[21] Unfortunately the opposite is happening: the root causes are not being addressed since the peace negotiations are dormant, and there are continued reports of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Since these violations—which include oppression, injustice, and indignity—are among the root causes, it is difficult to see how the vicious cycle of conflict, insecurity, and further conflict can be broken without paradigm shifts on both sides.

## Endnotes

1 Foreign debt was PHP 1.81 trillion (USD 35 billion) in April 2006 (Pedroso, 2006). Transparency International puts the Philippines in 117th place out of 159 countries in the world in terms of corruption in 2005; the UN Development Programme estimates that 13 per cent of the government's annual budget is lost to corruption; and a Hong Kong consultancy firm declared the Philippines under Arroyo to be the most corrupt in Asia (Mydans, 2006; Castañeda, 2006; Cabacungan, 2006).

2 This uprising is named after EDSA, a main highway in Manila where more than a million people confronted tanks and troops loyal to Marcos.

3 The barangay is the smallest government unit in the Philippines; each municipality or city is subdivided into barangays.

4 Though the CPP is now legal, illegal possession of weapons and rebellion remain punishable by law. Rebellion is considered a 'continuing crime' and is subject to the death penalty in the Philippines.

5 *Mahahalagang punto ng mga kaisahan at unawaan sa pagitan ng Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas at Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* (no publication data). The title of this document captured by government forces can be translated as 'Important points of unity and understanding between the Communist Party of the Philippines and the *Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan*.' Also captured was a 'Minutes re Final Talk' between representatives of the two groups dated 20 February 2006.

6 This point is based on a comment by Fred Lubang of Nonviolence International Southeast Asia.

7 Around 33,000 military troops with around as many Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units (CAFGUs, civilian auxiliaries to the AFP) battled guerillas in the 1990s. Though superior in number and logistics, the AFP has not been able to defeat the mobile NPA rebels.

8 For example the AFP terminated the successful Lambat Bitag in 1995 and deactivated some of its CAFGUs, which were used as 'holding units' after clearing the area of guerillas (Barabicho,

2003, pp. 5–7). For more details on how the CAFGU are mobilized in counter-insurgency, see Chapter 8.

9 Impressions of Kristian Herbolzheimer of the School for a Peace Culture after a visit to the Philippines in May 2006.

10 The CPP claims belligerency status on the grounds that it leads another state.

11 Sec. Teresita Quintos-Deles, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, at a meeting with peace advocates on 16 February 2005 in Quezon City.

12 According to the MILF Coordinating Committee for the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH), the number of clashes between the GRP and the MILF increased from fewer than 15 per year during 2004–07 to 146 in the first nine months of 2008. There were 72 clashes in August 2008 alone.

13 Surveys of the Social Weather Stations from 1993 to 2005 and results of the Bicol Kaiba Yahoo! Groups poll on 'Who do you think killed Sotero Llamas', 31 May 2006, show that people are polarized; the situation differs from town to town in the region with regions where the local NPA is able to proselytize and organize tending to be more favourable towards the group. The e-poll is limited to those who chose to answer the poll among those who belong to the e-group.

14 US dollar rate at 1 June 2006.

15 Executive Order No. 546.

16 Kerkvliet has studied the pre-Second World War Communist armed group Hukbalahap extensively and says the Left may 'come back with more vigor and vitality' and even become a 'newer' people's army (1996, p. 26).

17 Among these groups are church organizations, the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers (2006), which decried the impact of the war on children, and Sulong CARHRIHL, a network of groups and individuals monitoring the observance of the CARHRIHL (<http://www.sulongnetwork.ph>). The CPP-NPA-NDF has been suspicious of the concept of peace zones and civil society.

18 For more information see Philippine Campaign to Ban Landmines media monitoring reports from 2003–05. The NPA made a series of raids on police armouries in 2006. See for example Del Puerto and Pacate (2006, p. A2) and Napallacan and Gomez (2006).

19 This tactic—documented in numerous media reports on the use of IEDs—is also demonstrated in the cultural presentations of the NPA, such as the ambush scene in the skit 'Pakat' (*Punla*, 2004, p. 67).

20 Based on Abaya (2006a) and separate interviews with former Bicol Regional Party Committee head Sotero Llamas, Tabaco, Albay, 5 March 2006 and Gregorio Bañares, NDF Bicol spokesman, Camarines Sur, 3–4 June 2006.

21 This insight is attributed to Protestant Bishop Constante Claro of the United Churches of Christ in the Philippines.

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# CHAPTER 2

# Centre of Gravity: The New People's Army in the Bicol Region (Case Study)

Paz Verdades M. Santos

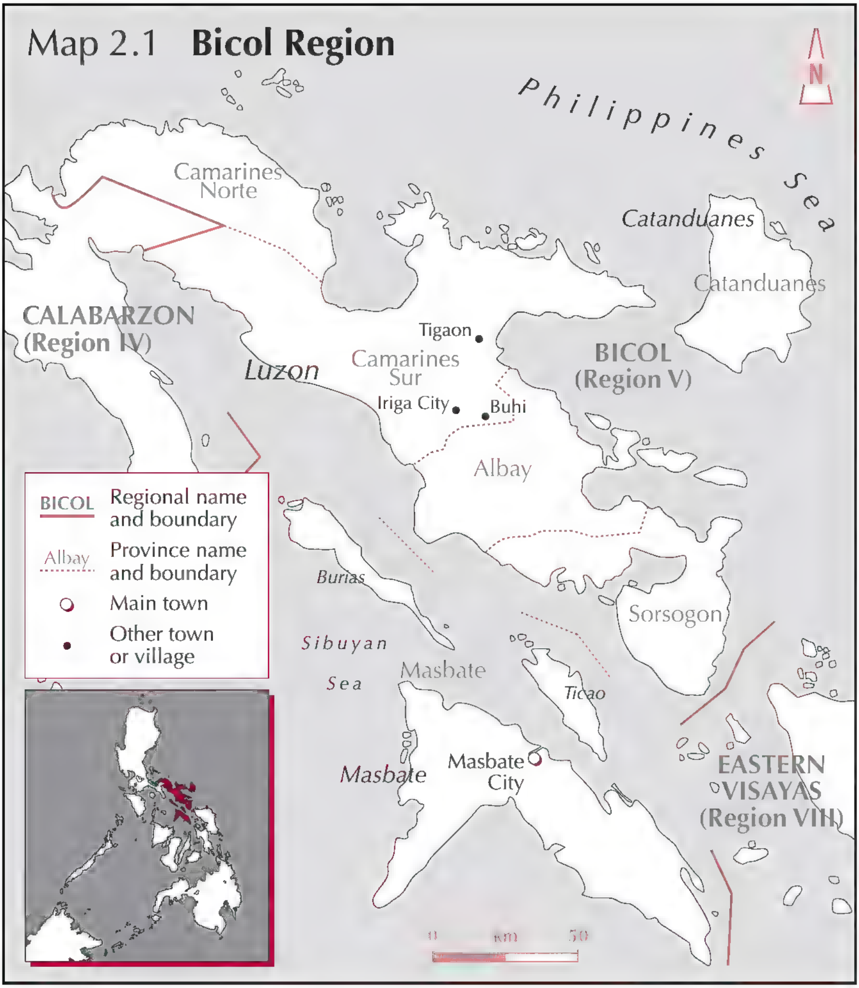
## Introduction

Mountainous, forested, poor, and neglected, the narrow Bicol peninsula in the south-eastern tip of Luzon has been one of the most fertile grounds for Communist insurgency since the 1960s. The region has contributed a large number of cadres, guerillas, and martyrs to the NPA cause. Despite its wealth of natural resources, it is the fourth-poorest region in the country.[1] Unequal distribution of land and resources,[2] corrupt traditional politicians with private armies,[3] lack of government services and industries, and the siphoning off of the region's wealth to Manila are among the causes of poverty (*Oragon*, 1990; Murphy, 1994).

## The NPA in Bicol

The NPA's local fortunes have mirrored its national trajectory. It gained its first foothold in the region in 1970, and by 1987 the Bicol command claimed leadership in many aspects: mass mobilizing in the urban areas, largest arms haul through direct seizure of arms from the military, platoon-size night operations, number of regional medical staff, party education, and a support base of 120,000.[4] The Bicol command was weakened by President Maria Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino's 'total war' against the Communist rebels in 1987, the NPA's neglect of 'mass work' in favour of armed struggle, and the split in the CPP (see Chapter 1). The NPA was able to regroup in the mid-1990s, and by 1997 the downward trend had been reversed.[5]

Map 2.1 **Bicol Region**


N
Philippines Sea
Camarines Norte
Catanduanes
Catanduanes
CALABARZON (Region IV)
Luzon
Tigaon
Camarines Sur
Iriga City
Buhi
BICOL (Region V)
Albay
BICOL Regional name and boundary
Albay Province name and boundary
Main town
Other town or village
Burias
Sibuyan Sea
Masbate
Ticao
Sorsogon
Masbate
Masbate City
EASTERN VISAYAS (Region VIII)
0 km 50

The Bicol region is currently one of the strongest NPA areas in the country. The regional Philippine National Police (PNP) states that the biggest threat in the region is still the CPP-NPA.[6] The Bicol National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) spokesman estimates that rebel forces in the region have surpassed the 1987 peak and that their mass support base grew by 35 per cent in 2002–05.[7] According to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Bicol NPA has 15 guerrilla fronts and between 600 and 700 armed combatants (Escandor, 2006; PHDR, 2005, p. 13).

The Bicol NPA continues to recruit young people whom they say 'come in droves'.[8] The governmental Regional Peace and Order Council for 2003 attributed the increase in the strength and number of firearms belonging to rebel groups in the region to the continuous recruitment of children and adolescents (PHDR, 2005, p. 26). The Bicol NDFP categorically denies that it recruits child combatants, but, according to the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, the NPA recruited some 50 children in Buhi, Camarines Sur, in July 2006.[9]

### Box 2.1 **Two tales of the NPA's beginnings in Bicol**

The official account of the NPA's beginnings in Bicol is that following its establishment in Central and Northern Luzon in March 1969 its central leadership decided to expand to the region in 1970 and encouraged student activists to follow suit (Guerrero, 1979, pp. vii–viii). This overlooks the actions of an earlier pioneering group, however. A five-man expansion team of student activists from Bicol was deployed to the region by the CPP central leadership in early 1969, before the NPA was created. They soon constituted themselves as a regional party committee, and from their base in Tigaon, Camarines Sur, began organizing among the local rural peasantry, as well as among students and a few middle-class allies in the cities. In August 1969 the CPP central leadership ordered them to abort their mission and pull out from the region, but at least two members decided to stay on, including 'Ka Maning', a surviving member now in his sixties who gave this account.[10] They were soon cut off from the centre.

The group received a boost in 1970 when they were joined by Romulo Jallores, a student activist originally from Tigaon who had come to the attention of the security forces in the Greater Manila-Rizal area and was forced to shelter with the Bicol group. He decided to stay on, persuading his activist group—the University of the East (UE)-Taytay Chapter of the Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (SDK, Democratic Association of Youth)—to join him in Bicol. They did so without CPP consent.

The SDK UE-Taytay group brought with them three firearms: a shotgun, a .45 calibre sub-machine 'grease' gun, and a .38 calibre paltik craft-produced revolver. This paltry arsenal was gradually augmented. No one in the group had military training, other than 'Ka Maning' who had taken a Reserve Officers Training Corps course in college but was more inclined towards political work. It was Romulo who took the military lead. From merely bearing arms during mass meetings, his armed group moved on to 'cleaning' (eliminating) bad elements in the localities where they operated, and then to deliberate encounters with the police and the military. The group eventually took on the name 'NPA'.

The Bicol group was written back into CPP-NPA history after its activism began to bear fruit and Ka Maning contacted the CPP central leadership asking to be 'reconnected'. He argued that this mode of far-flung and non-contiguous expansion was suited to the uneven development of the 'semi-colonial and semi-feudal' country, and that expansion should be undertaken wherever viable. The model was soon applied to Panay Island in the Western Visayas region, and has since been replicated in most other regions, resulting in the nationwide expansion of the CPP-NPA to all regions except Muslim Mindanao.

Two NPA rebels carry weapons and a communication radio in the Bicol region, with its landmark Mayon Volcano in the background. © Sandro Tucci/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

## The Bicol NPA at work: mass base building

All NPA platoons in Bicol conduct some form of 'mass work', such as community organizing and education, towards the setting up of a 'people's democratic government'. Even the main mobile guerilla unit is expected to spend 40 per cent of its time on mass work.[11] To form its parallel government, the NPA either organizes or works with existing women's, peasant, and youth organizations at the *barangay* (village) level, from which it selects the most 'advanced' members to form the Barangay Organizing Committee. When the activists and NPA guerillas are 'ideologically ripe' and show a certain level of political commitment, they are invited to join the CPP or the NPA (see Table 2.1).

The Bicol NPA needs to compete with only one other representative of government: a transient military that has proved less adept at community organizing (Salazar, 2005). The military cannot provide the services that the NPA grants to the villagers, such as land to till or lower land rent, the elimination of cattle rustlers, protection of peasants' rights, literacy lessons, health services,

Table 2.1

## Political-military infrastructure of a CPP-NPA guerrilla front

| Vanguard party (CPP)<br>'the force at the core leading our cause forward' | Guerrilla army (NPA) | Mass movement and united front (NDFP) |
|---|---|---|
| **Front committee** (for a Congressional District)<br>**Section committee** (for a Municipality)<br>**Party branch**<br>• in each NPA platoon<br>• in each organ of political power (for a barangay or barrio)<br>**Party group**<br>• in each NPA Squad<br>• in each Mass Organization | **Front (operations) command** (intended to correspond to a Congressional District)<br>**Company** made up of two or three platoons + the commander + vice-commander, i.e. 75–120 fighters. Company-sized battalions do not operate at present.<br>**Main platoon** for the stable guerrilla base, mainly carries out military work and provides a base and security for leading cadres.<br>**Two other platoons** dispersed as squads for the less stable guerilla zones, mainly carry out organizational work with the mass support base. Comprise two or three squads + the platoon leader.<br>**Squads** may be dispersed as (Armed Propaganda) Teams. Small armed units mainly for propaganda, expansion, 'social investigation', or special operations. Comprise five to ten fighters plus the squad leader. | **Organs of political power**<br>• Barrio Revolutionary Committee (elected)<br>• Barrio Organizing Committee (appointive)<br>**Working committees** for mass organizing, education, land reform, production, health, defence, arbitration, and cultural activities.<br>**Basic mass organizations** for workers, peasants, women, youth, cultural activists, and others.<br>**Internal security formations**<br>• People's Militia (responsible to the Working Committee on Defense) 'acts as the revolutionary police and reserve force' for the NPA<br>• self-defence units (for mass organizations)<br>**Sectoral organizing committees** at the barrio or barangay level.<br>**Sectoral organizing groups** in sitios (hamlets) or parts of the barrio.<br>**Barrio liaison group** of initial reliable contact persons in a new area. |

**Main references:** CPP and NPA anniversary statements and basic documents available on the CPP website <http://www.philippinerevolution.net>. Analysis by SSN.

or even protection from domestic abuse. The pattern has been for the military to sweep a village free of insurgents and then leave; civil government then fails to follow through with reforms and the villages become vulnerable to rebel organizing once more.

A Bicol NDFP spokesman says its structures amount to fully empowered parallel government organizations,[12] though former NPA rebel officers say the people's democratic government as envisioned has not yet been realized.[13]

## Revolutionary land reform

After base building, a second major task for the NPA is the implementation of 'revolutionary land reform' which aims to increase tenants' share in production, in contrast to the government's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) which aims to redistribute land.[14] In the 1980s and 1990s, the NPA was so strong that some landlords invited it to negotiate land rent and wages while others abandoned their holdings in remote uplands altogether in fear of the rebels. The NPA distributed abandoned or untitled land to farmers in its territories, issuing NDFP land titles.

The Bicol NPA claims that in 2001–04 it decreased land rent, helped the peasants set up their own cooperatives and other communal systems of production in the region, and alleviated the plight of people affected by natural disasters.[15] But some peasant organizers and NGO workers not aligned with the NPA accuse it of being no better than the landlords they deposed.[16] Moreover, the CPP-NPA's land reform has not been sustainable: when militarization forces the NPA to leave an area, landowners reclaim the land, increase land rent, lower wages, and harass protesting tenants. Some landowners sell the land, rendering NDFP titles useless, and peasant groups—where they exist—are too weak to fight the 'feudal lords' in the legal arena.

In the period November 2007–July 2008, the NPA was linked to at least five incidents involving the killing and physical assault of leaders and members of peasant organizations in Masbate island. The organizations in question had opted to pursue claims and join programmes under the government's CARP. The NPA eventually admitted responsibility for at least one of the killings, though alleged that it was punishment for murder, theft, and banditry, and not because of the victim's involvement in agrarian reform (Tagapagsalita, 2008).[17] No one has claimed responsibility for the other incidents, though they followed a similar pattern.[18]

CPP representatives had warned the agrarian peasant groups involved that '[i]n the areas where it is already clear to the people that the line you carry is wrong and the NPA is able to maintain its presence, we definitely do not welcome or are not at ease with your presence there' (Tagapagsalita, 2008). Some of the peasant groups were supported by the 'rejectionist' factions of the CPP, which turned the conflict in Masbate into a proxy war for the reaffirmist versus rejectionist debate on the merits of agrarian revolution or reform.

## Armed struggle

Guerilla warfare in the countryside has largely been mobile, targeting small, remote police outposts for small arms and high-powered rifles.[19] On mainland Bicol, there are presently no 'consolidated or liberated areas' to serve as camps and training grounds for long periods—this is in keeping with the decision at the CPP's controversial 10th Plenum in 1992 to discourage battalion-sized formations.[20] In areas where the rebels are strong, encounters and ambushes sometimes occur with the prior agreement of both parties, which suggests that rebels and soldiers may discuss rules of engagement.[21] The NPA states that it obtains most of its guns in encounters, ambushes, and raids on the military, police, and Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units.[22] In addition, it uses a percentage of whatever income it generates from taxes, pledges, and farming activities to buy guns. Guns and ammunition are often bought cheaply from military officers or rank-and-file soldiers who send them by private or even public transport from Manila. There have been failed attempts by the CPP-NPA national leadership to effect major arms shipments by sea.

The cost of the armed conflict with the NPA in Bicol is severe. As many as 25,000 people were killed in combat-related incidents and more than 50,000 displaced in Bicol from 1969 to 2004 (PHDR 2005, pp. 26–27). Telecommunications facilities, heavy equipment, and buses costing millions of pesos have been destroyed. The fear of revolutionary taxes limits investment and employment opportunities (PHDR 2005, pp. 26–27).

Armed NPA combatants practise formations while fellow insurgents look on, at a camp in the Bicol region.
Image provided by NDFP-Bicol

## Personalism and rootedness

Senior NPA members guide the development of mass activists from recruitment to their swearing-in as fully-fledged party members or NPA regulars. They gain a deep knowledge of the background, family, and personal idiosyncrasies of their members, and sometimes develop long-term friendships that endure even after comrades 'lie low' or resign.[23]

Such personal friendships proved significant in the handling of the devastating 'anti-infiltration' campaign of the 1980s, which left the NPA's Bicol branch relatively unscathed. In the 1980s, the former head of the Bicol Regional Party Committee (BRPC), Sotero Llamas, defied CPP orders to arrest, interrogate, and execute certain leaders, some of whom were his personal friends.[24] The campaign wiped out around 2,000 CPP members and mass activists nationwide, including 67 in the Quezon-Bicol Zone.[25]

When the NPA split in 1992, the Bicol NPA followed the 'democratic centralism' of the CPP-NPA-NDFP mainstream. The BRPC censored any controversial document that could foment insubordination or factionalism.[26] This insulated the regional forces from the emotional and physical hazards of the ideological debate and allowed the Bicol NPA to consolidate and focus on its tasks. Whereas activists from Manila used to be deployed to Bicol in the 1970s, the region is now the provider of warm bodies to other guerilla fronts in the country.[27]

The long-time and acknowledged most effective CPP-NPA Bicol regional leader Sotero Llamas as he ran for governor of Albay province, April 2004. Llamas was the victim of an extrajudicial killing in his hometown of Tabaco City in May 2006.
© Tony Macasinag/AFP

## Revolutionary taxes

For long periods in the early years, the NPA in Bicol was cut off from the national leadership of the CPP (see Box 2.1), and as a result 'claimed certain autonomy and undertook a greater variety of unorthodox practices' (Caouette, 2004). 'Revolutionary taxation'—once frowned upon by the CPP central leadership but now common to all regions—was the brainchild of the Bicol NPA. The group had been struggling to feed and arm its troops until it devised the system of charging 'revolutionary taxes' or 'donations' in exchange for mutually acceptable deals with landlords or co-opting them as tactical allies.[28] The NPA collects taxes from everyone from farm workers and fisherfolk to teachers, barangay officials, NGOs, and businesses and landowners. Businesses that do not pay up face the threat of sabotage (see for example Gamil, 2008).

A second source of income for the Bicol rebel group is the 'permit-to-campaign' (PTC) during elections—also now practised in all NPA areas. This can take the form of a direct cash payment to the NPA to allow the candidate to campaign in the countryside, a promise to pay a percentage of the congressional fund once elected, or a 'donation' of guns, cellphones, two-way radios, and laptops.[29] The NPA claims it does not threaten or attack candidates who do not pay up; it simply does not allow the candidates to enter NPA areas.[30] Llamas defended the PTC on the grounds that elections will not change the structure of society, whereas NPA taxes provide health services, protection of citizens from criminal elements, and conflict resolution at the village level.[31] He admitted, however, that the nature of the 'taxation' is altered by the fact that the NPA is armed.

## Outlook

The impoverished agricultural Bicol landscape has served the NPA well in its bid to expand in the area. But urbanization and globalization are creeping into the rural cities of the still mostly agricultural provinces of the region. Remittances from overseas workers are financing families.[32] Cafes, malls, cable TV, internet, and college education are becoming more accessible. Alternative venues for reform such as NGOs and legal left-wing formations have emerged for the reform-minded, and a number of local officials, NGOs, and civil rights groups are making efforts to improve governance and service provision to the poor. The military, which used to be greatly feared because of its poor human rights record, is refurbishing its image and is part of an integrated effort by government agencies to gain influence in rebel-dominated villages.[33]

Yet many local politicians are still primarily concerned with retaining personal power and wealth, and the central government in Manila rarely remembers Bicol outside of election periods and the regional Peñafrancia fiesta (*Oragon*, 1990).[34] Tales of military brutality and extrajudicial killings of noncombatants suspected of supporting the rebels are still documented in the local newspapers.[35] In such a context the NPA continues to provide a back-up justice system that can check the excesses of the abusive and the powerful.

Rutten's study of hacienda workers in Negros Occidental shows that the NPA's mobilization depended on 'two conditions at least: party strategy and the opportunities of activists to operate in the hacienda region' (Abinales, 1996, pp. 110–53). The same basic external conditions that allowed the NPA to take root and grow in the Bicol region in the 1960s still exist today. There is no clear alternative political organization with the same organizing principles and focus in rural areas. The CPP-NPA-NDFP has learned from its mistakes, regrouped, and benefits from decades of organizing experience. As 2008 ended, Bicol was—as it had been for some time—the second-strongest region of the NPA (ten guerrilla fronts by AFP count), after Southern Mindanao (Escandor, 2009).

Overall, however, the NPA cannot claim to have won the hearts and minds of the majority or even a large minority of the people in Bicol. Grass-roots workers claim that if people were asked, they would probably just like to be left alone by either military force to continue to eke out a living.[36] ■

## Endnotes

1 Gerelyn Balneg, NEDA Region 5 Assistant Regional Director in a speech at the 'Bicol Forum: 2005 Philippine Human Development Report' in Legazpi City on 2 March 2006.

2 In an interview on 3–4 June 2006, NDF-Bicol spokesman Gregorio Bañares stated that Bicol had the highest concentration of landlords in the country.

3 In Masbate, for example, two brothers of the ruling Espinosa clan, both congressmen, were killed in the first half of the 1990s, after which the younger brother's widow won the congressional seat. The Espinosas' main opponent was subsequently killed (Patino and Velasco, 2004).

4 Interview with the (late) former NPA regional commander Sotero Llamas on 5 March 2006.

5 Interview with Bañares.

6 Chief Superintendent Victor Boco of the PNP in Bicol speaking at the 'Bicol Forum: 2005 Philippine Human Development Report', in Legazpi City on 2 March 2006.

7 Interview with Bañares.

8 All key informants said this: parish workers, former and current activists, residents in NPA-influenced areas, and sources in the rebel movement. Radio journalist Johnny Dematera of 'Bikol Target', DZGB, who covered the NPA's release of soldiers to the ICRC, said that the NPA rebels seemed to be in their late twenties to forties, battle-tested, and battle-ready. The CPP's *Pulang Mandirigma: Images of the New People's Army* (2004) also highlights the youth of the guerillas.

9 E-mail from the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 26 July 2006.

10 Interviewed by Soliman M. Santos, Jr. in December 2008.

11 Interview with Bañares.

12 Interview with Bañares.

13 Separate interviews with Ka Diego and Ka Rem. See also Putzel (1996, pp. 145–46).

14 Under the CPP's revolutionary land reform programme, the maximum programme of land confiscation and free redistribution will take place only after the revolution is victorious—which presupposes armed strength enough to seize political power forcibly (CPP, 1977). In the meantime, the NPA is conducting its 'minimum programme' of land rent reduction, elimination of usury, raising of farm wages, improving prices of produce, raising production, and setting up rudimentary cooperatives.

15 Interview with Bañares. See also 'Developments in the Work of the New People's Army' (2006) at<http://www.philippinerevolution.net/cgi-bin/npa/updates.pl?year=39;type=02mbb>.

16 Interview with local NGOs which, for security reasons, cannot be named.

17 These charges were supposedly investigated and the accused was tried in absentia by a 'people's court' at the municipal level, though the NPA claims it tried to locate the accused. A death sentence was passed and affirmed by the higher organ of the CPP and NPA at the provincial level (Tagapagsalita, 2008).

18 The available facts on these incidents are from fact-sheets of the non-governmental Masbate Center for Rural Development and Empowerment, Inc. and the Partnership for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development Services, Inc., and from testimonies of community organizers and victims' relatives at a Round-Table Discussion on Extrajudicial Killings by Non-State Armed Groups on 4 August 2008 in Quezon City, sponsored mainly by the Kilusan para sa Repormang Pananakahan at Katarungang Panlipunan.

19 Supt. Boco of the Philippine National Police in Bicol described the police as the 'whipping boys' of the insurgency.

20 Interviews with key informants in rebel-influenced areas.

21 Interview with Fr. David, parish priest in a rebel area in Bicol, May 2006. (Fr. David is a pseudonym for a parish priest with rebels or rebel sympathizers among his parishioners or in the areas he visits as part of his work.)

22 Separate interviews with Llamas and Bañares inform this paragraph. See the NPA profile in Part Two.

23 In an interview, Ka Gillian said that her critical comments in the early 1990s might have been taken as mutinous in other regions, but in Bicol the leaders listened to the critique. Com-

radely relations were also manifested during the interview with Bañares and Ka Binay in June 2006, when during a rest period a young guerilla taught his commanding officer how to read.

24 Separate interviews with Llamas, Bañares, and former BRPC member Ka Rem, May 2006.

25 'The CPP/NPA/NDF Killings of its Own Officers and Members, Appendix to Charges Against 52 Suspected of Destabilization Plot against the Government,' 25 February 2006.

26 Separate interviews with Llamas, Bañares, and former liaison officer and united front worker in Bicol Ka Gillian, 31 May 2006. The 1946 CPP Constitution defines democratic centralism as a party principle meaning 'centralism based on democracy and democracy under centralized leadership' (Armed Forces of the Philippines, c. 1970, p. 22), similar to the military principle 'chain of command.'

27 Separate interviews with Llamas, Bañares, and cultural activist Ka Nelda.

28 Interview with Llamas. Sources in the peasant movement not aligned with the CPP-NPA-NDF state that in a Politburo meeting in April 1989 the Bicol regional committee was chastised for its concept of alliance work, particularly its practice of allowing big landlords (considered class enemies) seats in the Provisional National Democratic Government in exchange for revolutionary taxes.

29 Interview with local politicians and Gamil (2008). The information on the permit-to-campaign was confirmed by Sotero Llamas.

30 Interviews with key informants in the electoral arena. When a candidate in 1997 said he could not afford the PHP 100,000 (USD 3,800) required of him, the NPA allowed a 'down payment' of PHP 30,000 (USD 1,140). After he had won, the NPA go-between asked for either the balance of PHP 70,000 (USD 2,650) or a 'project' to be given to a contractor allied with the NPA. The politico argued that this would compel him to rig the public bidding for projects, rendering him just another corrupt official, and the NPA desisted. In another case, a candidate offered to withdraw from the electoral race when asked to pay the PTC, saying he would have to tell the people the real reason for his withdrawal. The NPA did not press him and he won a seat. (US dollar rates at 1 June 1997.)

31 Interview with Llamas, who said, 'We tax them because they go into our territory during elections; there are many votes in the countryside; three-fourths of Bicol is mountainous.' Llamas also said that the NPA raised PHP 6 million from elections in 1984 (USD 234,000); PHP 14 million in 1987 (USD 545,000); and PHP 12 million (USD 467,000) in 1988. When Llamas was captured in 1995, 15 politicians had already handed over more than PHP 5 million (USD 195,000) in cash, firearms, and radios to the rebels (Solmirano,1995; *Bicol Chronicle*, 1995). US dollar rates at 1 June 1995.

32 Nearly 3,000 Filipinos go abroad daily in search of a better life (National Statement of Overseas Filipinos in Canada, 2005), among them the Bikolnon.

33 Interviews with schoolteachers in rebel-dominated villages in Bicol.

34 *Oragon* (1990) is the local newspaper. The author lived in the region for two decades and has observed the phenomenon.

35 See for example Escandor (2005, 2006) and Sales (2006b). Key informants among the clergy also talked about this with the author.

36 Observation made by a participant at a Bicol Forum on 2 March 2006.

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## CHAPTER 3

# War and Peace on the Moro Front: Three Standard Bearers, Three Forms of Struggle, Three Tracks (Overview)

### Soliman M. Santos, Jr.

## Introduction

The armed conflict on the Moro front between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the main Moro armed groups—the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the Al-Harakatul Islamiyya (Abu Sayyaf Group, ASG)—is in its fifth decade, counting from the signal year 1968. This conflict is the main context for understanding these three key Moro armed groups. Its longevity is one of its most notable features.[1]

Although contemporary problems sustain it, the conflict has historical roots—namely, the marginalization of Islamized ethno-linguistic groups, collectively called Moros, under three centuries of Spanish colonization and nearly 50 years of United States dominance. Six key elements of the Moro problem were summarized by Philippine Muslim academic Macapado Abaton Muslim as: economic marginalization and destitution; political domination; physical insecurity; threatened Moro and Islamic identity; a perception that government is the principal culprit; and a perception of hopelessness under the present set-up (Abaton Muslim, 1994, pp. 52–133). This chapter looks briefly at the historical causes of the conflict before focusing on recent history, beginning with the trigger event of the contemporary Moro armed struggle, former President Ferdinand E. Marcos's declaration of martial law on 21 September 1972.

The chapter analyses the conflict along different dimensions, including the changing demands and aspirations of each group, the main policy responses of successive governments, and the international influences on the conflict. A heavy emphasis is placed on current efforts to resolve the conflict. A peace agreement signed between the GRP and the MNLF in 1996 has yet to be fully implemented. Dissatisfaction with that peace process has led many to pin their hopes for a comprehensive and lasting peace on the MILF, which has itself been in peace talks with the government since 1997. Complicating the peace process is the post-11 September 2001 anti-terrorism climate, which is assessed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

In broad terms, the conflict can be viewed as a clash between two imagined nations or nationalisms, Filipino and Moro, each with its own narrative of conflict. For the Moro liberation fronts, the conflict represents a conscious struggle to regain sovereignty for the independent Moro nation-states, or sultanates, in much of the Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan (Minsupala) islands. For the Philippine government and 20th-century nation-state, it has been a matter of defending the territorial integrity of the country against secession and dismemberment among the three main island regions of Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao (Luzviminda), enshrined as the three stars in the Philippine flag.

This chapter finds that:

- The contemporary struggle has involved shifts between the main Moro standard bearers (from MNLF to MILF, with ASG in the wings), the main demands (independence versus autonomy), main policy responses (military victory, pacification and demobilization, and institutional peace-building), main forms of struggle (armed struggle, Islamic diplomacy, and peace negotiations), and features of the armed conflict (conventional warfare, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism).
- The Moro conflict runs along three concurrent tracks: (1) implementation of the GRP–MNLF Peace Agreement of 1996, (2) GRP–MILF peace negotiations since 1997, and (3) ASG-led terrorism and the post-11 September 2001, US-led 'global war on terror.'
- These three tracks are reaching a crossroads between resolution and aggravation of the Moro conflict. The linchpin is the second track—the MILF peace process—which could result in a negotiated settlement of the Bangsamoro problem, especially if the parties build on gains and lessons learned from the already negotiated first (MNLF) track.

This will require an uncommon degree of unity between the Moro groups and political will and legal-constitutional creativity, flexibility, and accommodation from all parties. A possible outcome is a political solution short of independence in the short to medium term without necessarily foreclosing independence as a long-term aspiration of the Bangsamoro people.

## Some history and the root causes of the conflict

The contemporary armed conflict on the Moro front is the sharpest expression of the Moro or Bangsamoro problem. Its historical roots are deep. The Spanish colonial period was marked by the bitter Spanish–Moro wars spanning the 16th to the 19th centuries against small but fiercely independent sovereign nation-states in the form of sultanates of the main Moro ethno-linguistic tribes (Majul, 1973). These tribes were Islamized after the arrival of Islam in Sulu in the last quarter of the 13th century. The Sulu sultanate was established in 1450, and the Maguindanao sultanate was established in the 1620s. The Spanish colonialists called the Muslim natives 'Moros' after their hated enemy, the 'Moors', who had ruled Spain for nearly eight centuries. The Moro people remained independent but were not unaffected by the Christianized *indio* (Filipino) prejudice against Moros; this prejudice was fostered by the Spanish through common usage, official documents, and such cultural institutions as the 'moro-moro' plays depicting the Moros as villains.

A defeated Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States in 1898 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris. With the independence of the Philippines came the loss of Moro independence because, under the Treaty, Moroland was incorporated—Moro nationalists would say annexed—to the Philippines. After a period of peace in the far south while US colonial forces were occupied with the Filipino–American War in the north, a US military campaign—officially dubbed the 'pacification of the Moros'—began in 1903. The United States was finally able to unite Christian and Muslim Filipinos under a single government in 1913 by force of arms.

Some of the features of US rule that were considered particularly egregious by the Moro population and are cited among the historical root causes of today's conflict were the imposition of confiscatory land laws and changes to public administration, both of which benefited mainstream Christian Filipinos, and the destruction of traditional political institutions, which were replaced by a military government of Moro province, comprising Sulu, Zamboanga, Lanao, Cotabato, and Davao districts (Abaton Muslim, 1994, pp. 52–133).

Scholars disagree about the genesis of Moro identity. A number credit the United States with the initial construction of a Moro entity for US colonial purposes at a time when there was supposedly no Moro nation (McKenna, 1998; Abinales, 2000). Moro scholars say, however, that the Moros had 'already evolved an indigenous notion of polity; while the concept of nation was not yet around that time, the "spirit" of nation must have already been put in place' (Wadi, 2003a; 2006, p. 100). The world-view, political ethos, and cultural orientation of Moro society differ from European nation-statism (Wadi, 2003a; 2006, p. 100).

A US colonial official in charge of Moro affairs defined the Moro problem as the question of:

> *method or form of administration by which the Moros . . . can be governed to their best interest . . . for their gradual advancement in culture and civilization, so that in the course of a reasonable time they can be admitted into the general government of the Philippine islands as qualified members of a republican national organization.* (Saleeby, 1913)

The post-colonial Philippine government's definition of the Moro problem remains essentially the same, including in its corresponding policy solution of national integration.

The Moro problem is situated within the broader Mindanao context in which relationships are problematic *among* the three main resident peoples—the majority Christian settlers and migrants and their descendants, the Moros or Muslims, and the non-Islamized indigenous tribes or Lumads—and *with* the GRP. The problem thus has both horizontal (people-to-people) and vertical (people-to-government) dimensions. An important complicating factor is that Mindanao is now only about 20 per cent Muslim in terms of population, while 75 per cent is Christian, representing a major(ity) countervailing force that is often opposed to Moro aspirations.[2] That this is almost the exact reverse of Mindanao's demography one century ago provides an indication of the historical dimensions of the Moro problem.

An armed member of the MNLF passes a civilian house next to their camp in Jolo, Sulu, in January 2008.
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A scholar who studied the revolt in Muslim Mindanao has said, '[t]he theories that run the gamut from religion to misgovernment were relevant only in so far as they were all pieces of an enormously complex jigsaw. To pick any one of them as the outstanding cause of the upheaval would be a hindrance to understanding the total picture' (George, 1980, pp. 11–12). In other words, the Moro problem has to be seen holistically. It is not only multidimensional but also evolving.

## Moro standard bearers

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was the main standard bearer of the contemporary Moro armed struggle from 1972 to 1996. The group was founded by its long-serving Chairman, Nur Misuari, as an instrument for the liberation of the Moro nation 'from the terror, oppression and tyranny of Filipino colonialism' and 'to secure a free and independent state for the Bangsa Moro people' (Misuari, 1974). It reportedly began as an underground movement in the youth section of the Muslim (later Mindanao) Independence Movement (MIM),[3] which was organized on 1 May 1968 by Cotabato Governor Datu Udtog Matalam, and rekindled the spirit of independence among the Moros but under the traditional Muslim elite. The young Moro student activists and intellectuals eventually superseded the traditional Muslim political leaders who were either co-opted or intimidated by the Philippine government (Che Man, 1990, pp. 77–80).

The MNLF led the armed resistance in Muslim Mindanao against martial law, which was, in essence, a rebellion against the Philippine state. Through armed struggle, Islamic diplomacy, and peace negotiations, the group was the main vehicle for placing the Moro cause on the national and international agendas. This cause was articulated by Misuari as one 'waged primarily in defense of the *Bangsa* (nation), the homeland, and Islam' (Misuari, 1992). The group's early and lasting contribution was to make the name 'Moro' respectable and the basis of a common identity and consciousness as a nation of the 13 disparate ethno-linguistic groups of Muslims in its historical homeland of Minsupala. In practice, the MNLF tends to emphasize the nationalist (national self-determination) and territorial (homeland) dimensions of the struggle over the Islamic one. It counterposes its Moro nationalism to Filipino nationalism (Wadi, 1999, p. 10; 2003b, p. 118; 2006).

The MNLF signed the Tripoli Agreement in 1976. But the failure a year later of negotiations on the implementation of the agreement led to frustrations, differences of opinion, and an eventual split within the MNLF. When talks collapsed, Misuari wanted to revert to armed struggle for independence, while his Vice Chairman Salamat Hashim was in favour of pursuing the peace process to gain autonomy under the Tripoli Agreement. Hashim led a breakaway group in late 1977, initially calling itself the New MNLF Leadership and, later, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 1984. This split would later shape the course of the Mindanao conflict and peace process.

The split was based on differences not only of political strategy and objectives but more fundamentally of ideological orientation (secular-nationalist versus Islamic revivalist), leadership styles (centralized versus consultative), and ethnic allegiances (Tausug versus Maguindanao), reflecting the respective spheres of the historical Sulu and Maguindanao sultanates. Maranaos, the other major Moro ethnic group, participates in the leaderships of both the

MNLF and the MILF, although its area, Lanao, is closer geographically and culturally to the Maguindanao heartland of the MILF (Abbahil, 1984, p. 197).

The MILF includes 'Islamic' in its name to emphasize its radical Islamic revivalist ideology and orientation and to distinguish itself from the secular-nationalist MNLF.[4] It represents 'a new form of Moro nationalism whose objective is not only a demand for separate bangsa but an assertion for a separate and independent government and homeland animated by political ideals of Islam and *shari'ah* (Islamic law)' (Wadi, 1999; 2003b, p. 119; 2006). Religion has a more central position in the MILF than in the MNLF, which reflects the educational backgrounds of their respective founding chairmen—Hashim at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo and Misuari at the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City. Hashim belonged to the traditional (*datu*) and religious (*ulama*) elites, while Misuari was of the secular elite (Che Man, 1990, pp. 127–29). The ulama or Islamic scholars play a significant role in the leadership of the MILF but not in the MNLF.

After splitting from the MNLF in 1977, the MILF built up its armed strength in Central Mindanao. Its main camp, Camp Abubakar, was firmly established by 1981, followed by at least seven more camps by 1985 (ICG, 2004, p. 5). In March 1984, the MILF officially declared itself a separate organization representing Moro resistance against government coercion and co-optation. It is presently the main standard bearer of Moro aspirations, a position it has held since the start of the Estrada administration in 1998. Hashim died in 2003 and was replaced by the more pragmatic and flexible secular military leader and chief peace negotiator Al Haj Murad Ebrahim. Despite reports of tensions within the MILF and a few field commanders breaking ranks, the MILF has been able to maintain its unity.

The rise of the MILF has come with the reversal of the fortunes of Misuari, the MNLF, the implementation of the peace agreement, and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao ARMM (see, implementation of the GRP–MNLF peace agreement, below). MNLF fragmentation continued in 1982 with the emergence of the Maranao-based MNLF-Reformist Group (MNLF-RG) led by Dimas Pundato. He and his associates were eventually co-opted into the government Office of Muslim Affairs in 1985. After the breakdown of the Tripoli Agreement, the Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization (BMLO) re-emerged and vainly attempted to forge unity among the MNLF, MILF, and MNLF-RG. The BMLO disappeared following the deaths of its leaders, the Muslim politicians Rashid Lucman and Salipada Pendatun, in 1984 and 1985, respectively. That marked the end of traditional Muslim elite leadership of the Moro struggle.

In fact, Bangsamoro generational change has been a critical variable in the whole Mindanao conflict and peace process, and 'the upcoming generation will be the most influenced by the unfolding international tendencies in the Muslim world' (Oquist, 2002). The Al-Harakatul Islamiyya group, known as Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), was founded by Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani in Western Mindanao in 1989 on his return from exposure to radical Islamism abroad, particularly the jihad against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The group represents a younger and more radical Bangsamoro generation disgruntled with the MNLF leadership. It calls for an independent Islamic state for the whole of Mindanao and had been using extremist, terrorist methods against Christian civilians long before 11 September 2001.

How the Bangsamoro successor generation 'relates to the existing configuration of the MNLF, MILF, and ASG options, or whether it will develop new options of their own, is an unknown quantity of great importance' (Oquist, 2003). For now, it is unlikely that the ASG will become the Moro standard bearer.

MILF fighters in Dinaig, Maguindanao, display their firepower before the mosque inside their camp in December 2007. Many other camps also have mosques inside. © Arthur C. Fuentes/SSN

All told, whether MILF or ASG becomes the main surviving representative of the 'fragmented Moro warrior' (David, 2000), it is still important to remember that, in the words of former MNLF commander and Basilan Governor Gerry Salapuddin, they both 'originally came from the same tree, the MNLF' (Arguillas, 1994).

## Main demands: autonomy vs. independence

The main demand of the two Moro liberation fronts has alternated between independence and autonomy, though they have sometimes been articulated simultaneously by a single front. For example, the MNLF upped the ante by raising independence as leverage to push for the implementation of an agreement on autonomy. Presently, the MILF represents the independence option for the Moros, while the MNLF pushes for autonomy. Recently, the MILF indicated a willingness to accept greater levels of self-determination short of outright independence in the short to medium term.

At the start of the movement in 1968, the main demand was for independence. The 1976 Tripoli Agreement marked the most significant juncture in the GRP–MNLF peace process because it shifted the dispute from independence to autonomy. The key factor in this change was the intervention of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), especially the resolution of the 5th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in June 1974 urging the Philippine government 'to find a political and peaceful solution through negotiation with Muslim leaders, particularly with the representatives of the MNLF [. . .] *within the framework of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines*' (OIC, 1974, emphasis added).

For the next 20 years, the Tripoli Agreement would be the main frame of reference between the GRP and the MNLF. It provided for the establishment of autonomy in 13 southern provinces, subject to the plebiscitary consent of the affected population. A provisional government would be appointed by the president; foreign policy, national defence, and mines and mineral resources would be under the control of the central government. The GRP was to undertake all the necessary constitutional processes to implement the agreement.

The implementation of the Tripoli Agreement was immediately problematic, however. In March 1977, Marcos issued Proclamation No. 1628, creating two regional autonomous governments, reducing by three the 13 provinces under the Tripoli Agreement, and then subjecting this to a plebiscite in April of that year. The MNLF rejected this new arrangement, leading to a breakdown of the peace talks, of the ceasefire, and of the autonomy process. The MNLF's continued armed struggle during the remaining period of the Marcos regime tended to project the cause of independence, but this was tempered by the need to maintain diplomatic support from the OIC. The aim was still to push for the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement.

The eventual ouster of Marcos and assumption to office of President Aquino in 1986 eased the deadlock, leading to a ceasefire and the resumption of peace negotiations. This resulted in the Jeddah Accord of 3 January 1987, which deviated from the Tripoli Agreement by entertaining an MNLF proposal to grant full autonomy to Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Palawan (23 provinces in all) 'subject to democratic processes' (GRP–MNLF, 1987).

But this was overtaken by the ratification of the 1987 Philippine Constitution with provisions for an autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao 'within the framework of this Constitution and the national sovereignty as well as territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines' (Article X, Sections 15–21). The MNLF rejected the new approach on the basis that it had not been involved in its formulation, and unsuccessfully called for the suspension of the plebiscite. When the plebiscite was held in 1989, only four of the 13 provinces—Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi—voted to join the ARMM. Certain parameters for the autonomous region were now embedded in the fundamental law of the land.

The third and final episode of the GRP–MNLF peace negotiations—now under the Ramos administration—resulted in the Jakarta Accord of 2 September 1996. This was deemed to represent the final and full implementation of the Tripoli Agreement, but it again fell short. Instead of the provisional government the MNLF had pushed for—which the government stated it could not accommodate under the 1987 Philippine Constitution—it proposed a transitional implementing structure to be introduced in two phases. Phase 1 consisted of a three-year extendible transitional Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development, under the Office of the President, to give the MNLF the necessary exposure and chance to prove itself over a now 14-province Special Zone of Peace and Development. Phase 2 would see the operation of the new Regional Autonomous Government. Before this could take place, Congress would need to pass new legislation on the autonomy clauses of the Peace Agreement, and a plebiscite would need to be held to determine the final extent of the territory.

In the meantime—outside of the Peace Agreement—the government offered the MNLF a politico-electoral alliance with the Ramos ruling party, which effectively gave it control over the existing ARMM. Misuari successfully ran unopposed for ARMM Regional Governor in September 1996, barely a week after the Peace Agreement was signed.

The MILF rejected the Peace Agreement not only because it deviated from the framework of the Tripoli Agreement but also because it failed to resolve the Bangsamoro problem. Outlining its approach to peace talks, the MILF stated that '[f]inding a *political* and lasting solution to this problem will form part of the agenda in the forthcoming formal talks between the GRP and the MILF panels, *with the end in view of establishing a system of life and governance suitable and acceptable to the Bangsamoro people*'[5] (emphasis added).

## Main policy responses

The main policy response of the Marcos regime to Moro unrest, particularly to the MIM in the early 1970s, was the proclamation of martial law in September 1972. This prompted open rebellion by the MNLF. The OIC intervened diplomatically in 1973 by threatening to use its influence in OPEC to support an oil embargo. This, and the military stalemate in 1975, compelled the government to negotiate with the MNLF.

The government combined hard and soft tactics. In addition to its military efforts, it granted concessions and personal benefits to MILF leaders with the aim of fomenting splits in the group (Ferrer, 2005, p. 3). It also addressed the human dimension of the problem, most notably through the United Nations Development Programme in Muslim Mindanao, launched in 1973. Although ostensibly concerned with pacification, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and development, the programme was, in fact, a deliberate attempt to build a nationalist consciousness—of a Filipino nation with a single people and not several peoples—among both Muslims and Christians (Majul, 1999). But the programme failed, partly because of the purge from government of its prime mover, Executive Secretary Alejandro Melchor, in 1975. Some of the projects from that era remain, 'but few have been effectively or consistently administered: a Shariah law code and court system, attention to madrasah schools, barter trade, the Amanah bank, haj administration, aid funds. For both practical and symbolic reasons, these are important to Muslims wherever they live' (Noble, 1992, p. 17).

Because the Aquino administration had to deal with a military establishment averse to peace with the Moro and Communist rebel groups, it shifted to a new peace strategy of multilateral consensus-building, which downgraded bilateral negotiations with rebel groups (Campado, 1996, p. 180). One form this took was the creation of a multi-sectoral Mindanao Regional Consultative Commission in 1988, tasked with helping Congress draft the Organic Act for the Autonomous Region. In the end, the executive meddled with the act and Congress failed to adopt many of its draft provisions in the final version, Republic Act No. 6734 of August 1989 (Basman, Lalanto, and Madale, 1989).

From the start of his six-year term in 1992, President Ramos viewed a certain level of peace as essential to his economic development programme, which was aimed at bringing the Philippines to newly industrialized country status. He created the National Unification Commission in September 1992, which conducted nationwide consultations at the provincial and regional levels that fed into his comprehensive peace process, institutionalized through Executive Order No. 125 in September 1993 (Palm-Dalupan, 2000).

By the time of the Estrada and Arroyo administrations, there were three discernible competing policy positions, according to Paul Oquist of UNDP (Oquist, 2002; 2003). These are:

- The *pacification and demobilization position*, which consists of negotiating concessions necessary to achieve the cessation of hostilities and demobilization of rebel combatants.
- The *military victory position*, which advocates the military defeat of the MILF (and the New People's Army), the political defeat or marginalization of the

MNLF, and the extermination of the ASG and other terrorist and kidnap-for-ransom groups.

- The *institutional peace-building position*, which pushes for the short-, medium-, and long-term construction of policies and institutions for peace in the economic, social, political, cultural, and ecological spheres through participatory and consultative mechanisms.

Oquist noted that all three competing positions have come into play in the Mindanao peace process—sometimes simultaneously—and all have significant sources of support within civil society and government, including the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). None of these actors is monolithic in relation to these positions, not even the AFP or the MILF. The relative influence of these positions varies across time, making drastic policy shifts possible, even within a single administration. Perhaps the best example of the latter in relation to the MILF front was the shift from the 'all-out war' policy of President Estrada in 2000 to the 'all-out peace' policy of President Arroyo in 2001 and then back again in 2002–03 (Santos, 2002, pp. 20–21). But even the Estrada administration had engaged in significant peace initiatives with the MILF from 1998 until just prior to the 'all-out war' of 2000.[6] This lack of consensus, coherence, and consistency has prolonged the peace process.

## International response and influences

In its formative years, the Moro conflict primarily involved skirmishes between Christian (*Ilagas*) and Muslim (*Barracudas* or *Blackshirts*) vigilantes. A series of Ilaga and military atrocities against Muslims in Mindanao, mostly in the provinces of Cotabato and Lanao in 1970–72, raised concern in the Muslim world, especially when reported as acts of genocide (Jubair, 1999, pp. 138–39). The most publicized of these was the Manili massacre in June 1971, when 70 Muslim women, children, and old men were killed by Ilagas inside a mosque in the Manili neighbourhood in Carmen, Cotabato. As a result, Libyan leader Colonel Muammar al Ghadaffi developed a personal interest in the situation of Muslims in southern Philippines (McKenna, 1998, citing Cesar Adib Majul, 1985). By March 1972, the OIC first took official notice and expressed 'serious concerns for the plight of Moslems living in the Philippines' (OIC, 1972). There was no mention of the MNLF—it would take President Marcos's proclamation of martial law in September 1972 to bring the MNLF into open rebellion.

An early focus of martial law was the collection and confiscation of firearms from civilians, especially in Muslim areas, which sparked Muslim resistance. A month after martial law was declared, some MNLF Maranao forces—acting without official consent from the Central Committee—led an attack on government forces in Marawi City in Lanao del Sur in what became known as the Marawi Uprising. That same year the 'Moro war of liberation' officially began in Jolo island, Misuari's Tausug heartland. A third offensive followed in Cotabato in Central Mindanao in February 1973 (Jubair, 1999).

Marcos responded by creating the Central Mindanao Command (Abat, 1993). The fighting that ensued was considered the most serious threat to the security of the state, with the MNLF displaying the military capacity of an organized army. The conflict entered a phase of conventional and positional war in 1973–74 that saw the bloodiest fighting in the Philippines since the Second World War. It was also the period when the worst human rights and interna-

### Box 3.1 **Costs of the conflict**

At the conclusion of the 1996 GRP–MNLF Peace Agreement, the government's Peace Panel disclosed that:

> *[o]ver a period of 26 years since 1970, more than 100,000 persons were killed in the conflict in Southern Philippines . . . The AFP has spent about P73 billion in connection with the Mindanao conflict since 1970 . . . Sixty-one percent of our Army and Marine battalions . . . more than 40 percent of our artillery capability and 50 percent of our armor assets . . . 63 percent of our tactical aircraft [were committed to the Mindanao conflict] . . .* (Jubair, 1999, pp. 162–63)[7]

Estimates of economic losses due to the Mindanao conflict range from PHP 5 billion to 10 billion (USD 9.5 million–19 million) annually from 1975 to 2002, and the armed conflict has uprooted anywhere from one-fifth to one-third of major Moro tribes from their ancestral homelands (Balisacan, 2005). Harder to measure are the loss of life directly from combat, the same loss due to internal displacement, and the injuries and indignities suffered by victims of discrimination, especially Muslims or Moros.

According to the UNDP, a conservative estimate of costs of both the Moro and Communist conflicts in the Philippines from 1969 to 2004 is at least 120,000 lives lost, military expenditure of at least USD 6 billion, and losses in gross domestic product of at least USD 17.5 billion (Oquist and Evangelista, 2006, p. 27).

tional humanitarian law violations were perpetrated by both sides. The war reached its peak and a stalemate in 1975 (Castro, 2005, pp. 1–63).

An alarmed OIC initiated discussions with the Philippine government in March 1972. A year later, the 5th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in Kuala Lumpur issued a resolution urging the Philippine government to enter into peace negotiations with the MNLF, which it named as 'the sole and legitimate representative of the Bangsamoro people' (OIC, 1973).

These developments signalled a shift from the arena of armed conflict to that of Islamic diplomacy. Fighting had tapered off by 1975 and by the late 1970s the conflict was being fought as a lower-intensity guerrilla and counter-guerrilla war. Even before the OIC's official involvement, the MNLF had begun to approach leaders of Muslim countries for support.[8] The GRP was forced to play catch-up, deploying its Department of Foreign Affairs to drum up international support for the process (Wadi, 1998, p. 65).

There were three episodes of GRP–MNLF peace negotiations under the successive administrations of Marcos, Aquino, and Ramos; between negotiations, the conflict was played out in the diplomatic circuit and, to a lesser extent, in the military field. The OIC periodically issued resolutions that almost perfunctorily called for the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement.

A member of the Bangsamoro Armed Forces, the armed wing of the MNLF, demonstrates how to use a rocket-propelled grenade rifle in January 2008. © Arthur C. Fuentes/SSN

New possibilities for war and peace were opened up by the downfall of the Marcos regime. This was dramatically illustrated by the protocol-breaking meeting between President Aquino and MNLF Chairman Misuari in his homeland of Jolo in September 1986, when they agreed to a ceasefire and to restart peace negotiations, which resulted in the Jeddah Accord of January 1987. That same month, the MILF launched a five-day tactical offensive (the 'MILF 5-Day War') in a show of power. A truce was immediately agreed upon, and Aquino traveled to Cotobato City to meet Murad and MILF senior officer Mohagher Iqbal (Jubair, 1999, pp. 186–87, 194–95). The MILF had arrived at the negotiating table. Early on, the Aquino administration adopted a policy of deinternationalizing the MNLF, avoiding reference to the Tripoli Agreement and OIC mediation.[9]

The post-11 September 2001 period has seen the escalation of violence by international terrorist, mainly Islamist, armed groups and the countervailing US-led 'global war on terror'. The international terrorist networks that have emerged during this period rely on highly dispersed and autonomous but well-coordinated and -resourced small unit cells (Howen, 2002). They threaten civilian populations and rely on globalized information communications technology for impact. After a lull that lasted well into the post-11 September period, the ASG returned to view with the Superferry 14 bombing in February 2004, which killed 116 people, and bombings in three cities on Valentine's Day in February 2005. The group has reportedly claimed to be connected with al-Qaeda and has been described by National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales as 'by far the most dangerous group in the country today' (Elegant, 2004).

There are now three parallel tracks in connection with the armed conflict on the Moro front:

1. The implementation of the Peace Agreement with the MNLF;
2. Peace negotiations with the MILF; and
3. Post-9/11 terrorism and counter-terrorism, focused on the ASG.

The third of these tracks is dealt with in detail in Chapter 5 of this volume. Arguably, it is less important than the peace processes under-way with the MNLF and MILF, dealt with below, since these groups are far more representative of the aspirations among the Bangsamoro people.

## Implementation of the GRP–MNLF peace agreement (1996–present)

Although the established autonomy for the Muslims in the southern Philippines is a limited one, the final peace agreement achieved by the MNLF offers some gains for the Bangsamoro people in terms of recognition, representation, participation, access, and power-sharing.

The MNLF has effectively demobilized from combatant mode but has not disarmed—an arrangement that has been acceptable to both sides. Some 7,500 fighters have been integrated with the army and police, representing at least half its peak force strength (see Chapter 7). This has left the MNLF substantially depleted, though it continues to retain some fighters, many arms, and a mass base. The MNLF claims it has some 80,000 ex-combatants (*Bangsamoro Parsugpatan*, 2004).

The group was at the helm of the regional government of the ARMM for two successive terms, from 1996 to 2005, and some MNLF leaders have successfully run for local government positions, though not yet successfully for national positions. Invariably, they have found it harder to run a government than to rebel against it. They have also led special regional development bodies, such as the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development and the Southern Philippines Development Authority, until these were abolished. At the local level, some MNLF mass-base communities have become 'peace and development communities' benefiting from livelihood, cooperative, and other projects with finance from international and foreign development organizations.

Yet the MNLF feels that the peace process, particularly Phase 1, is being concluded unilaterally, and that its important socio-economic development elements are not being satisfactorily implemented. These include a 'Mini-Marshall Plan' for MNLF ex-combatants and the non-MNLF poor in the 14 provinces that make up the Special Zone of Peace and Development.[10] The MNLF claims the government has failed to provide resources for this component.

The introduction of Phase 2 was signalled by the 2001 New Organic Act for the ARMM, Republic Act No. 9054, which the MNLF sees as violating aspects of the peace agreement, notably control over strategic minerals. It views the expanded ARMM (Basilan province and Marawi City added) as too weak to address even basic health and education needs in some of the ARMM provinces, which are among the poorest in the country. There is a general perception within the MNLF that it is being marginalized within the peace process. Indeed, frustrations with the perceived failure to implement the agreement and Misuari's feeling that he was being eased out of his positions of authority in the ARMM and MNLF sparked an outbreak of hostilities between Misuari and GRP forces in Sulu and Zamboanga in November 2001, which led to Misuari's arrest. Misuari had started to view the peace agreement, even with its gains, as a 'chain' from which the MNLF would be better off freed to pursue a new phase of the struggle for independence, though preferably in a 'peaceful, democratic way' where he 'need not be in the forefront anymore'.[11] Crucially, this was to be carried out with the backing of the OIC, since 'we cannot afford to be isolated from the Islamic world.'[12]

The OIC for its part has signalled a desire to close the chapter on the implementation of the peace agreement. The *Report of the Secretary-General on the Question of Muslims in Southern Philippines* (2006) concluded that Phase 2 of the peace agreement:

> *can never be implemented because the Senate and Congress, instead of ratifying the agreement, have made an organic act – RA 9054 on March 31, 2001 . . . a solid stumbling block on the path towards the implementation of PA 1996 . . . The [government] has already violated [the 1996 Peace Agreement] unilaterally by disregarding the MNLF participation as the principal party to the agreement.*

The MNLF has made its own share of mistakes, however. It, perhaps fatally, neglected to maintain or re-create itself, whether as a politico-military liberation organization or as 'a political party and/or civil society movement and/or cooperative movement and/or business group, and preferably all of the above' (Oquist, 2002). Concessions, cooptation, divide-and-rule, demobilization, and, worse, political defeat or marginalization through its own mismanagement of the ARMM have diminished the organization. It could be said to have won the war by forcing the army into a stalemate; however, it lost the peace.

Splits have weakened the movement. In recent years, it has broken into four factions: the mainstream Misuari group, which has the biggest armed force of the factions; the initially anti-Misuari government-sponsored 'Executive Council of 15' (EC-15) represented by Hatimil Hassan, Misuari's long-time vice chairman and incumbent ARMM assemblyman; the anti-Misuari Islamic Command Council, which is the most Islamic-oriented faction (closer to the MILF in orientation); and the pro-Misuari faction of Alvarez Isnaji, an MNLF Sulu commander turned politician. An MNLF unity process has been under way with support from Libya, but the trend since 2006 has been towards a return to Misuari preeminence in the MNLF. The GRP continues to officially recognize the EC-15 but has failed in its attempts to engineer an 'MNLF without Misuari' since, in the words of one MNLF insider, 'Misuari and the MNLF have become interchangeable'.[13]

The most recent iteration of the MNLF was kick-started with the February and November 2005 hostilities in Sulu involving the MNLF Misuari group, reportedly fighting alongside ASG forces. Contrary to the GRP's insistence that the Sulu situation is normalizing, there is still a state of war in the province. At the height of hostilities in 2005, more than 80,000 Sulu civilians were reportedly displaced, equal to 15 per cent of the total population. In treating what it calls the 'Misuari Breakaway Group' as 'lawless elements' to be destroyed in the same way as the ASG, the government risks the MNLF mainstream rejecting the Peace Agreement in favour of a more radical independence bid now bannered by the MILF.[14]

Constructive steps were taken by both the MNLF and the government in 2006 to resuscitate the Peace Agreement and its implementation. The government initiated a 'Sulu Road Map for Peace and Development' with MNLF participation. Soon enough, the MNLF in Sulu had shifted policy by actively cooperating with the army against the ASG there, with good tactical results. But these gains in Sulu were short-lived, as unfulfilled peace promises triggered renewed war-mongering (Taylor and Idjirani, 2006).

## GRP–MILF peace negotiations (1997–present)

With the unravelling of Misuari's leadership, the MNLF, the implementation of the 1996 peace agreement, and the ARMM, the MILF took over as the main standard bearer of Moro aspirations. The MILF seeks to secede from the Philippine system rather than to access or share power within it, which brings it into frontal conflict with the government.

Aside from the constitutional challenge it represents, the MILF is also a formidable military opponent. Though presently considered second to the Communist-led NPA in terms of its threat to national security, the MILF has an estimated 12,000 combatants concentrated in Central Mindanao—slightly more than the nationwide NPA. MILF numbers have remained basically intact, despite being subjected to two major army offensives within three years, the 'all-out war' of 2000 and the 'Buliok offensive' of 2003 (Castro, 2005). Its arsenal includes rocket-propelled grenades—which the NPA does not have—for use against AFP armoured vehicles (see MNLF profile). Before the 'all-out war' the MILF had 13 major fixed camps and 33 secondary ones from which it conducted semi-conventional warfare, including positional warfare with the AFP. It has since shifted to a more mobile guerrilla mode, with base commands using more remote or hidden field camps (see MNLF profile).

Although it retains weapons, it is clear that the MILF has made a strategic decision to try for a negotiated political solution to the Bangsamoro problem. The best evidence of this is that it persisted with peace negotiations despite the two AFP offensives, which targeted MILF camps, the most contentious issue of the talks. It has adopted what may be called a 'realist' position, perhaps realizing that it can neither win nor be defeated militarily.[15] Since 1997, the GRP–MILF peace negotiations have been held in two stages: a domestic stage from January 1997 to June 2000 and a diplomatic stage with Malaysian mediation since March 2001 (Santos, 2005). Negotiations were suspended in response to each of the two AFP offensives, from June 2000 to March 2001 and from February 2003 to the present, though exploratory talks have been held. The pattern of recurrent hostilities appears to have been broken since a mutual ceasefire was agreed in July 2003—though marred by two gun battles in January 2005—and has been supported by international and civil society ceasefire monitoring mechanisms. The ceasefire is novel in that it has a development component (see Box 3.2). It would later evolve to include a counterterrorism element as well, albeit under the rubric of criminal interdiction.

Although the talks started early in 1997 with the presentation of the MILF agenda 'to solve the Bangsamoro problem', the negotiations on the substantive agenda were begun only in April 2005, starting with the main item of what would constitute the Bangsamoro ancestral domain. Itself already a complex and contentious substantive issue—even if only in the context of indigenous peoples' rights—the issue of ancestral domain is further complicated by its possible linkage to territorial (e.g. homeland) and governance (e.g. self-rule) aspects of the Bangsamoro problem.

The GRP's preferred framework for a final peace agreement with the MILF is to enhance the ARMM based on power-sharing between the MNLF and the MILF.[16] Negotiations to unite the MNLF and the MILF are indeed taking place, at the MILF's initiative, but are challenging given the long-standing animosity arising from the 1977 MNLF–MILF split as well as their different frameworks for the Mindanao peace process. The MILF says it 'has no ill-feeling' towards the MNLF but having 'varying framework(s) is very difficult' (MILF, 2006).

The question is whether the government's framework will satisfy the MILF's vow to establish 'a system of life and governance suitable and acceptable to the Bangsamoro people'.[17] The MILF is not interested in simply taking over the ARMM, which has limited autonomy and was already lost in the 2005

Rocket-propelled grenades are part of the arsenal of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces, the armed wing of the MILF.
© Arthur C. Fuentes/SSN

## Box 3.2 **The three-in-one ceasefire**

Excerpts from an interview with Mohagher Iqbal, long-standing Chairman of the Committee on Information of the Central Committee of the MILF and current Chairman of its Peace Panel in negotiations with the government.

*How and why did the novel concept of a ceasefire not only for peace negotiations but also for rehabilitation and development, and then later for anti-criminality/anti-terrorism, develop?*

*Ceasefire for rehabilitation and development.* 'Agreeing to cooperate and coordinate with government in implementing development projects in areas affected by the war even before a peace agreement is signed is a way of helping our people.' It is also 'an indication that the MILF does not want war in the future; putting structures and everything on the ground that would only be destroyed by war later makes no sense. We are aware that the direct beneficiaries of these are the people who support the MILF. The implementation of development projects even before the signing of an agreement helps build confidence among the negotiators, the people, and the government.'

The MILF maintains that its agreement to some concessions 'has not in any way adversely affected our bargaining position nor made any of our negotiators waver in their positions put forward at the negotiating table.' Its Central Committee ultimately decides what to offer, counter-offer, and accept from the government, while its negotiating panel is only an 'implementing body' that ensures that the decisions of the Central Committee are carried out in the negotiations.

*Ceasefire for anti-criminality/anti-terrorism.* The MILF signed a Joint Communiqué for the creation of the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) in May 2002 when concern about terrorism was at its peak.

'We have to be very clear that the MILF is not a terrorist organization. It is a genuine revolutionary organization with a legitimate political cause, objective, and agenda.' While the MILF agreed to form the AHJAG, it 'deliberately refused' to sign a proposed AHJAG document that identified some organizations in the Philippines as terrorist organizations on the grounds that even the United Nations had yet to come up with specific definitions for terrorist organizations and acts of terrorism.

The MILF says it agreed to the formation of the AHJAG in order to target crime, in particular kidnapping for ransom. 'If they [criminals] are harmful to civilians, the people, they are also harmful to us . . . It was only coincidental that the AHJAG was signed at the height of the so-called global war on terror . . . [I]f the formation of the AHJAG helped avert any plan to declare the MILF as a terrorist organization, this was only consequential. Being taken off the terrorist listing was not our overriding intention in agreeing to help government run after syndicated crime. This is our way of showing that the MILF has a conscience for the people.'

*What have been the relative achievements/strengths and shortcomings/weaknesses of these three themes of ceasefire?*

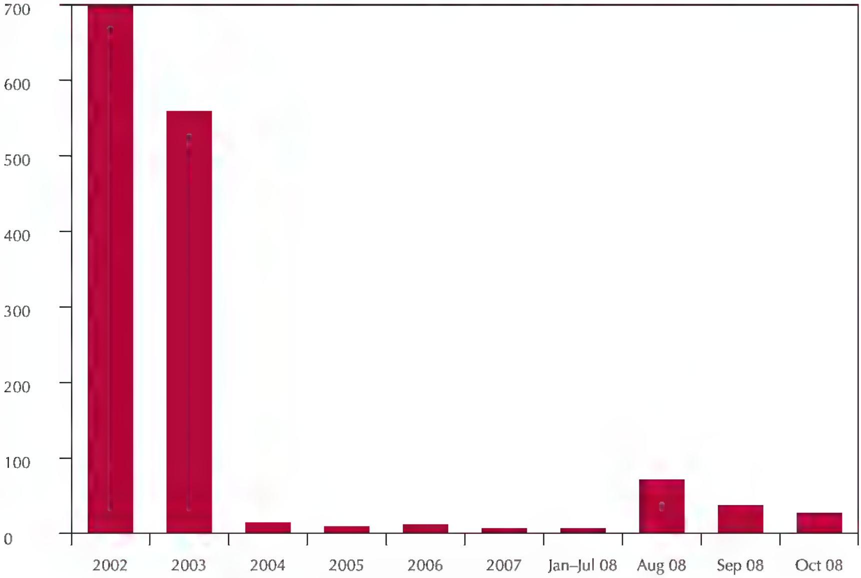
The biggest problems lie with the ceasefire for rehabilitation and development. The government and the MILF agreed that the MILF would organize a development agency—the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA)—to determine, lead, and implement rehabilitation and development projects in areas affected by the war. The agency is supposed to raise resources and train personnel for its operations. 'Being a product of negotiations, the BDA is supposed to be a "development arm" of the MILF which will be funded by government and private organizations. But until now, the BDA has been moving forward on tooth and nail; it doesn't have funds.' The MILF says it is 'not expecting much from the government despite the fact that allocating funds for the Agency is part of its commitment.'

In terms of the impact of the anti-criminality/anti-terrorism campaign, the MILF enumerated, among others, the AHJAG's 'success' in solving a number of recent kidnapping cases. But the MILF says there have been problems. The government agreed to give the MILF its list of wanted criminals so that it could help confirm whether those on the list are indeed criminals, but, although it did provide a list of criminals being targeted by the army, 'they never gave us a list of the so-called high value targets.' This has led to clashes between the MILF and the AFP, for instance in Datu Piang, Maguindanao, when the army conducted an operation without coordinating with the MILF, and the 'MILF seized several firearms and killed government troops. The government could not complain because they violated the agreement.' The MILF insists such incidents do not threaten the peace process 'as long as both parties come up with recommendations so that such mistakes will not be repeated.'

The interview was conducted by Romeo O. Elusfa on 18 June 2006 in Cotabato City, Muslim Mindanao, and was arranged by Initiatives for International Dialogue. Direct quotes are indicated with quotation marks; otherwise, responses are paraphrased.

Figure 3.1

**Clashes between GRP and MILF before and after the 2003 ceasefire**



**Notes:** The 2003 ceasefire followed the February 2003 AFP 'Buliok offensive' against the MILF.

**Source:** Coordinating Committee on Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH).

ARMM elections to the traditional Maguindanao political clan led by Datu Andal Ampatuan. Moreover, animosity between Ampatuan and the MILF escalated into gun battles between their forces in 2006 and 2007, which indicates that the rise of such Moro traditional leaders in the ARMM could be a setback to the peace processes with the MNLF and MILF (Bacani, 2005, pp. 25–33).

## Conclusion

The cycle of armed conflict has already involved at least two generations in the contemporary period and, if not resolved, is likely to escalate under a radicalized younger generation. The main cause of armed rebellion in Mindanao is that which motivates terrorism in the region: the historical systematic marginalization of the Bangsamoro people in their homeland. Frustration with the main policy responses of government has led to more intense struggle, often backed by force of arms.

Of the government's three main policy responses—pacification and demobilization, military victory, and institutional peace-building—the pacification and victory positions have held sway because of their attraction as quick fixes, but they promote only short-term or tactical objectives rather than a strategic durable peace. It is the institutional position 'for all its complexity in conceptualization and difficulty in implementation [that] offers the best hope for lasting, sustainable peace' (Oquist and Evangelista, 2006, p. 31).

With regard to the three parallel tracks of the Moro armed conflict, the peace negotiations with the MILF should be prioritized, since they could serve as a catalyst for the broader Mindanao peace process and even for the fight against terrorism on the Moro front. The MNLF is not likely to begrudge the MILF additional gains for Bangsamoro aspirations that it might achieve in its peace negotiations with the government. Indeed, the MNLF might usefully be brought into the negotiations (Quimpo, 2000). Since the ASG—the subject of the third and final track—for the most part rejects negotiations, pursuing a peace settlement that involves it directly is not an option at present.

A peace settlement with the MILF could involve anything from the existing ARMM to Bangsamoro independence, though after a decade of struggle the

MILF is unlikely to settle for mere enhancement of the ARMM. At the opposite extreme, full independence is certain to be a deal breaker from the government's perspective and would require constitutional reform. The MILF has, however, left this option open through the proposal of an eventual referendum on the final political status of the 'Bangsamoro Juridical Entity'.

A key variable in the peace process for the region is unity between the MILF and the MNLF and among the MNLF factions since it:

> *is difficult to imagine an experiment in Islamic self-determination succeeding against a backdrop of Moro disunity. While such disunity may have been instigated by Manila's imperial governments in the past, no amount of constitutional accommodation by the center can solve this now for Muslim Mindanao. Self-determination now requires that the Bangsamoro people imagine themselves as one nation.* (David, 2001)

MILF–MNLF unity—or interface since it covers two sets of aspirations among the Bangsamoro people—should be seen in the context of a final solution to the Bangsamoro problem. If at least the most important of their aspirations are addressed or solved, this would remove the social basis for another, new Moro rebellion. This would leave only fringe extremist groups, such as the ASG, which could be dealt with by the Moro mainstream instead of the GRP. For example, in Sulu, the common area of operation of the MNLF (Misuari group) and the ASG, the MNLF State Chairman says that, if the unresolved state of war between the MNLF and the GRP is addressed, then solving the ASG problem would be next in line.[18]

Of course, Moro self-determination and related ancestral domain arrangements will also have to factor in the multi-ethnic character of Mindanao, which includes the *Lumads* (indigenous highlander tribes) and the Christian settler majority, both of which have expressed strong concerns about Moro territorial claims. And, since it is this Christian Filipino majority which is the government's main constituency, the government's political will to grant sufficient Moro self-determination and self-rule also depends on political considerations, aside from national interests.

## Epilogue (September 2008)

Developments in August 2008 again shifted the balance among the three tracks of war and peace on the Moro front. GRP–MILF peace negotiations ('track two') broke down over the ancestral domain issue: the signing of a memorandum of agreement (MOA)[19] on this point was aborted after local and national opponents successfully petitioned the Philippine Supreme Court to block it.[20] This resulted in new hostilities when three so-called rogue MILF base commanders attacked Christian civilian communities in Central Mindanao (ICG, 2008).[21] These attacks and the ensuing military counter-operations caused 600,000 people to be internally displaced (AI, 2008). A few spoilers undid years of fragile achievement in the peace negotiations, moving the situation from the brink of peace to the brink of war in just a matter of days. At this writing, in late September 2008, the group is still poised for war.

Even if war can be averted, damage has been done to 'track two' and to the wider Mindanao peace process. What appeared to be a breakthrough consensus between the government and MILF peace panels on the question of ancestral domain, with agreement on concept, territory, resources, and governance, was roundly rejected by the Filipino establishment. It is doubtful whether the negotiations can be resumed where they left off in the near future. In the meantime, the government's military operations continue against the three 'rogue' MILF base commands, with the danger that the fighting will spill over to other commands. The MILF leadership appears to have ordered its other base commands to hold back from entering the fray, issuing a high-level policy declaration in early September to 'continue to uphold the Peace Path as still the best way forward' (MILF, 2008). Realistically, the best hope for what remains of the Arroyo administration (to 2010) is a non-derogation of the 2001 agreements on the security aspect of the peace agreement (basically the ceasefire) and the 2002 agreements on humanitarian, rehabilitation, and developmental aspects. This would help prepare the ground for a return to the ancestral domain issue and other substantive matters of the peace negotiations when these become more viable, perhaps under the next administration.

As it is, the Arroyo administration has not only abandoned the signing of the MOA, it has also issued a new policy for all peace processes, not just the talks with the MILF. The president has shifted focus from dialogues with rebels to 'authentic dialogues with the communities, with DDR [Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration] as the context of our engagements with all armed groups'.[22] In other words, peace negotiations with rebel groups become secondary to 'authentic dialogues with the communities', and, when it comes to the former, the framework is now DDR. This could be read by the rebel groups as a provocation to war, since it was the attempt in September–October 1972 by the Marcos regime to disarm the Moros that sparked their rebellion in the first place, which the MNLF capitalized on by serving as their rallying point. The plan to generate community-level consensus against armed struggle could easily be manipulated to mobilize community vigilantism against the MILF or its community mass base, thus triggering communal violence reminiscent of the early 1970s.

Kristian Herbolzheimer, a peace researcher in Mindanao, noted that:

> *[g]overnments have a natural tendency to reject political talks and to limit negotiations to an issue of dissolving the armed groups . . . The recent move from the Philippines' government to 'refocus' talks in order to concentrate on dialogue with communities instead of dealing with the MILF is framing the issue of the 'moro problem' as an either/or equation. Instead, as many have urged for, government and MILF should uphold talks while at the same time be open to the voice and concerns of those potentially affected by the outcomes of the talks. If armed conflict could be addressed simply talking to the communities, there would be no need for political negotiations anywhere in the world.* (Herbolzheimer, 2008)

The rebel groups in peace negotiations are supposed to articulate the root causes of rebellion, internal armed conflict, and social unrest—though some do not. But the GRP's new policy has inverted this 'root causes' paradigm. It has lost patience, as Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro explains: 'We have been working on the paradigm of root causes for a long time . . . Most often, the paradigm is used as an excuse to bear arms against the government' (Esguerra, 2008). To return to the policy divisions characterized by Oquist, this shows a clear swing to the positions of military victory and of pacification and demobilization. It also demonstrates the current administration's lack of policy consistency, since a previous executive order defined a policy for a comprehensive peace process.[23]

The response of the Filipino establishment to the setback in the GRP–MILF negotiations has been to take the path of least resistance and refocus on 'track one'—implementation of the GRP–MNLF final peace agreement. Yet only the Misuari leadership and its supporters in the MNLF have expressed a preference for the present limited autonomy arrangement enshrined in that agreement, while other significant leaders and segments of the MNLF as well as of the Bangsamoro people favour the higher degree of self-determination achieved by the MILF in its stalled negotiations.

The setback to the GRP–MILF peace negotiations could strengthen 'track three' as newly disgruntled and radicalized forces defect to the ASG and other groups that resort to terrorism. MILF commanders and mujahideen might question the viability of the negotiations in the wake of their collapse and, consequently, consider other more drastic or radical options, such as war or even terrorism. Finally, the setback in the GRP–MILF peace negotiations also has a bearing on the ongoing suspension (since August 2004) of the other major peace negotiations with the Communist-led National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP)—the political body affiliated with the NPA—which, unlike the MILF, has not agreed to a ceasefire. The NDFP sees the MILF as its tactical ally and is trying to entice it—for example, by tactical offensives to draw military pressure away from the MILF—to drop its peace strategy in favour of war. All of the above highlights how crucial the MILF track is in determining the overall balance between war and peace in the southern Philippines.

## Endnotes

1 Comment on an early draft of this chapter by Mark Turner, co-editor of *Mindanao: Land of Unfulfilled Promise* (Turner, May, and Turner, 1992).

2 Comment by Turner.

3 This is not to be confused with later Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM) led by Mindanao Christian politician Reuben R. Canoy and coming from a Mindanaoan rather than a Moro perspective.

4 Among the main tenets or beliefs of Islamic revivalism are: (1) *Din wa Dawla* (religion and state)—no separation; (2) *Qur'an wa Sunna* (the Holy Book and the way of the Prophet Muhammad)—return to these for authentic renewal; (3) Puritanism and Social Justice—as Islamic values and practices, rejecting Western cultural values and mores as alien to Islam; (4) *Hakimiyya* (Allah's sovereignty) and *nizam al-Islam* (Islamic order or system)—where

Shariah (Islamic law) is supreme and should replace Western law; (5) Jihad (holy war or inner struggle); and (6) although Westernization is condemned, modernization as such is accepted but subordinated to Islamic beliefs and values.

5 MILF Technical Committee on Agenda Setting, 'Agenda'. 25 February 1997.

6 Comment by Turner.

7 Citation quoted in the speech of Sen. Alberto G. Romulo, Senate Majority Floor Leader, delivered on 26 August 1996 and published in 7 September 1996 issue of the *Manila Bulletin*.

8 Abraham L. Iribani, MNLF Peace Talks Secretariat Chairman, Special Emissary, and Spokesman during the 1992–96 peace talks, written interview answers to Soliman M. Santos, Jr. on 25 December 1998 in Manila.

9 Based on confidential documents in the author's possession, and as can be gleaned from *Aide Memoire on the Mindanao Peace Talks: Position of the Philippine Government Panel* (Manila: Peace and Development Panel for Mindanao and the Cordilleras, 1987) and *Peace Betrayed: MNLF-RP Negotiations, Jan. 1–July 25, 1987* (n.d.) for the MNLF perspective.

10 Hatimil E. Hassan, long-time MNLF Vice Chairman, interview by Soliman M. Santos, Jr. on 6 October 2004 in Cotabato City; and MNLF Maj. Gen. Abdul Sahrin, Message to the Bangsamoro National People's Congress, 23 December 2003, Davao City, reprinted in *Bangsamoro Parsugpatan*, Vol. 2, No. 1, March 2004, pp. 30, 21.

11 Bauzon (1999, p. 266) concludes that, 'while the Agreement concedes little by the GRP, it traps Misuari and the MNLF apparatus into a corner where it has compromised their ability to demand greater autonomy than that spelled out in the Agreement, much less ask for independence or return to the battlefront.'

12 Interview with Prof. Nur Misuari, long-time MNLF Chairman, on 20 February 2002 in his detention house inside Fort Sto. Domingo, Sta. Rosa, Laguna, Philippines.

13 Al-Walid notes of March 2007.

14 These were among the key findings of the Sulu Peace and Solidarity Mission conducted by the Mindanao Peaceweavers on 27–30 March 2005.

15 Comment by Turner.

16 Sec. Norberto B. Gonzales, Presidential Adviser on Special Concerns, Office of the President of the Philippines, interview by Soliman M. Santos, Jr. on 6 June 2002 in Manila.

17 MILF Technical Committee on Agenda Setting, 'Agenda'. 25 February 1997.

18 Maj.-Gen. Khaid O. Ajibon, State Chairman, Lupa Sug State Revolutionary Committee, MNLF, interview by the Sulu Peace and Solidarity Mission of the Mindanao Peaceweavers on 28 March 2005 in Indanan, Sulu.

19 Formally titled 'Memorandum of Agreement on the Ancestral Domain Aspect of the GRP-MILF Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001', initialled by the parties as a final draft on 27 July 2008 and scheduled for signing in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 5 August 2008.

20 The local opponents were led by local officials of provinces and cities who opposed inclusion of their localities in the territory of a new 'Bangsamoro Juridical Entity', while national opponents were mainly leaders of the Liberal Party opposed to the Arroyo administration. The lead case is docketed as G.R. No. 183591, with the Supreme Court issuing a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) on 4 August 2008 against the MOA signing.

21 The three 'rogue' MILF commanders are Ustadz Ameril Umbra Kato of the 105th Base Command, Abdullah Macapaar ('Commander Bravo') of the 102nd Base Command, and Aleem

Solaiman Pangalian of the 103rd Base Command. Their initial attacks were staged in the provinces of North Cotabato, Lanao del Norte, and Saranggani.

22 This new government peace policy formulation is taken from a presidential statement on 28 August 2008.

23 President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Executive Order No. 3, 'Defining Policy and Administrative Structure for Government's Comprehensive Peace Efforts,' 28 February 2001. EO 3's precursor was President Fidel V. Ramos' Executive Order No. 125, 'Defining the Approach and Administrative Structure for Government's Comprehensive Peace Efforts', 15 September 1993. EO 125 drew much from the recommendations of the National Unification Commission (NUC) which had conducted nationwide consultations in 1992–93.

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## CHAPTER 4

# Terrorism and Philippine Armed Groups: Networks, Lists, and the Peace Process (Overview)

### Soliman M. Santos, Jr.

## Introduction

Two points are worth making at the outset of this overview of terrorism in the Philippines after 11 September 2001. First, terrorism—the deliberate targeting of civilians to spread terror or extreme fear among the civilian population—is a very real problem that needs to be tackled in earnest. A Human Rights Watch report, illustrated with photographs of bombing sites and victims, reports that violent Islamist groups in the Philippines have killed or injured more than 1,700 people in bombings, kidnappings, executions, shootings, and other attacks since 2000 (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Some 40 major bombings took place between February 2000 and July 2007, mostly in the southern island region of Mindanao, but also in the Manila capital region. But although the problem of terrorism should not be denied, neither should it be exaggerated.[1] Nor, as has happened in the Philippines, should it be conflated with more fundamental problems of a different nature, discussed below.

The second point is that terrorism is a serious violation of human rights, including the most basic right to life and the right to freedom from fear. Effective actions to counter terrorism should also, of course, comply with human rights standards. One of the consequences of the Philippine government's anti-terrorism campaign has been an escalation in human rights violations, the brunt of which has been borne by the Muslim minority community.

This overview pits the prevailing international anti-terrorism discourse against a more grounded and historically informed perspective of the main security problem in the Philippines. It focuses on what might be called 'the

Philippine front' (encompassing both 'the Moro front' and 'the Communist front') of the 'global war on terror'. A close look at armed groups involved raises questions about the existence of a South-east Asian terrorist network and about the internationally dominant definitions of terrorist organizations. The differences in perspectives on terrorism and insurgency translate into differences in policy approaches. This is best illustrated in the impingement of the 'global war on terror' on the peace processes for resolving decades-old rebellions and internal armed conflicts in the Philippines.

The chapter reviews the literature on so-called terrorist groups in the region and evaluates dominant anti-terrorist thinking and tools, including the various international 'terrorist' listings, before homing in on the practical impact of anti-terror discourse and analysis in the Philippines. It looks closely at how peace processes between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Communist-led National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) have been affected by the post-11 September climate. The Abu Sayyaf Group is addressed separately in Chapter 5.

Among the findings of this chapter are:

- Externally inspired terrorism is not the main security problem in the Philippines. Rather, the rebellion or insurgency is home-grown; it has been around for more than four decades and therefore pre-dates the al-Qaeda phenomenon.
- A close look at the relevant armed groups in the Philippines, as well as those in wider South-east Asia, raises serious questions about the accuracy of descriptions of terrorist networks, of the major listings of terrorist organizations, and of various definitions of terrorism in common usage.
- The 'global war on terror' has caused significant collateral—if not direct—damage to the two most important ongoing peace processes in the Philippines, namely, those with the MILF and with the NDFP.

## Terrorism is *not* the main security problem in the Philippines

Terrorism, whether international or domestic, is *not* the main national or human security problem in the Philippines, notwithstanding the various non-state or anti-state armed groups in the country. It was elevated to this status shortly after the 2001 Dos Palmas hostage crisis when several American tourists were kidnapped by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). After the kidnappings, the US military revived its interest in the Philippines and re-established a limited presence in the country. The following year, the Philippines began to be referred to as the 'second front' in the 'global war on terror' and the 'second Afghanistan', creating a picture that was not reflective of actual events (Garrido, 2003).

Indeed, the Philippines government in its own intelligence assessments of the threat that various armed groups pose has concluded that its main security problem is not terrorism, but rather the decades-old nationwide Communist insurgency led by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)-New People's Army (NPA) and a few breakaway factions, and the Moro insurgency in Muslim Mindanao led by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Al-Harakatul Islamiyya (Abu Sayyaf Group, ASG). Neither al-Qaeda nor Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) features among the government's biggest threats. Yet the Philippine government has followed its major military ally, the United States, in focusing on these groups and the local groups they are said to have infiltrated.

A long-time Colombian observer of Philippine armed conflicts and peace processes laments the distortions that result when armed groups in the Philippines are viewed through the prism of the post-11 September 2001 'global war on terror':

> *A visitor to the Philippines today, ignorant of historical facts, could be excused if, on the basis of his reading of the local press and listening to official speeches, he were to conclude that guerrilla warfare and terrorism are one and the same thing – a post New York 2001 September 11 phenomenon. History and historians and their time crafted country subjects have evaporated from current analysis. More than 300 years old engines of conflict in Muslim Mindanao and older than 100 years roots of strife in Luzon have been pushed aside to put in place a domestic reflection of present conflict and strife in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, to suddenly explain all Filipino ongoing armed struggles in terms of what is happening elsewhere in Asia is not only a gross manifestation of ignorance about this country but irresponsible regarding the quest for peace.*[2]

This view is shared by at least one US-based counter-terrorism scholar, Zachary Abuza of the US Institute of Peace, who has advised US officials to:

> *recognize that neither the ASG nor the MILF pose the largest security threat to the GRP [Government of the Philippines]. Indeed, the ASG is a nuisance, though were it to be able to attack Manila on a regular and sustained basis, serious economic repercussions would result . . . The single greatest threat to the Philippine state continues to come from the CPP/NPA.* (Abuza, 2005, p. 41)

Although the CPP-NPA has been designated as 'terrorist' by the United States and the European Union, it does not trigger the same level of alarm on the counter-terrorism radar screen because it is not Islamist[3] and so cannot be part of the al-Qaeda network. The ASG and the MILF *are* Islamist and so there is some basis for linking them to al-Qaeda and JI, even though the MILF, like the MNLF, is currently involved in an ongoing peace process and is observing a ceasefire agreement with the government. There would be no al-Qaeda or JI links in the Philippines if groups such as the ASG and the MILF did not exist, however. And there would be no MILF and ASG groups without the MNLF from which they sprang. In other words, it is the Moro rebellion that provides the social base and the logistical modalities for al-Qaeda or JI to enter and operate in the Philippines, specifically in Muslim Mindanao.

The current dominant thinking on counter-terrorism is that Filipino armed groups, such as the ASG and the MILF, have been co-opted into a South-east Asian al-Qaeda and JI network.[4] But other views of the phenomenon also exist, in particular those of scholars on terrorism and insurgency in South-east Asia, a few of whom are quoted below.[5] The different research perspectives support divergent policy approaches to and actual engagements with terrorism and insurgency.

Timo Kivimaki of the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies writes that:

> *Nordic tradition in peace research and softer approaches to security can offer alternatives and new insights to the tougher approaches and more straightforward perceptions of the Anglo-American countries. At the same time, it is clear that the regional analysis often succeeds to illuminate the socially constructed reality of political violence more accurately than the analysis of outsiders.* (Kivimaki, 2003, p. 4).

He also speaks of the need for a more balanced view 'on violence caused by terrorism, as well as authoritarianism that uses counter-terrorism as an excuse' (Kivimaki, 2003, p. 4).

David Wright-Neville of Monash University, Australia, has noted that 'the bulk of terrorism-related research consists mainly of a cataloguing of individual terrorists and the organizations and networks to which they belong' (Wright-Neville, 2004, p. 29). For Phar Kim Beng of City University of Hong Kong, 'the tendency has been to connect seemingly unrelated dots to form a vast network' and to use terrorism as 'the conceptual blueprint to explain religious and political violence' in the region (Phar, 2003, p. 6). 'In joining up the dots to uncover the Al Qaeda network in the region', says Andrew Tan of Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, 'it is important to bear in mind that given the complex nature of the Moro rebellion and the presence of fundamental grievances, not every Muslim rebel in the region is a dedicated Al Qaeda operative' (Tan, 2003, p. 112). In other words, the indigenous or localized roots of the conflicts in the region must not be overlooked.

At the same time, says Tan, some local scholars have been too inward-looking and have failed to engage broader scholarship and to relate to broader global developments and perspectives.[6] Kit Collier of the International Crisis Group (ICG) and Australian National University notes the reluctance of many country specialists who are steeped in local history and culture to take terrorism seriously as a legitimate field of inquiry. He also criticizes the perspectives of global and regional specialists for their al-Qaeda- and JI-centric paradigms, respectively (Collier, 2006, pp. 27–28).[7]

## Terrorist networks and the al-Qaeda connection

Abuza speaks of al-Qaeda's global 'network of subsidiaries' or 'affiliates' or 'franchisees', and points to JI as its regional affiliate in South-east Asia (Abuza, 2002b, p. 30). Rohan Gunaratna of the Singapore-based International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research also speaks of al-Qaeda's 'global network of terror' in the Asia-Pacific region (Gunaratna, 2002). Maria A. Ressa, long-standing Cable News Network (CNN) Jakarta Bureau Chief, has described the network in the following terms:

> *Jemaah Islamiyah's leaders created a clandestine umbrella organization known as Rabitatul Mujahidin, which includes all the armed Muslim groups in the region: the MILF, Abu Sayyaf, Laskar Jundullah, and several others. Although each of*

> *these groups has a separate leadership structure, for specific operations, they act essentially as part of the Jemaah Islamiyah and al-Qaeda terror network.* (Ressa, 2003, xii; emphasis added)

The evidence for this supposed network is slim, however. It comes mostly from military and police intelligence and has been rejected by experts on the situation of armed groups in Muslim Mindanao. For example, Phar Kim Beng has criticized much of the dominant counter-terrorism-related literature on the grounds that 'true verification has to come from rigorous research, rather than from the confessions of Muslim clerics extracted by the state. The quality of the confessions is further subject to doubt as most were given under coerced conditions' (Phar, 2003, p. 6). Another source of evidence is illegal wiretaps, which police sources admit 'wouldn't stand up in court'.[8] Some of the resulting intelligence reports have been contested even within the broader intelligence and police communities.[9]

Not all police and intelligence reports are inaccurate, however, and good intelligence analysts may have a better operational understanding of war and terrorism than scholars and journalists.[10] Problems arise when intelligence details are not cross-checked against a variety of official and private sources, including non-state armed groups, and are repeated as fact. For example, a newspaper article from 2006 claimed that the MILF harboured the JI in its Jabal Quba training camp in Mount Cararao,[11] an assertion judged by the civil society network Bantay Ceasefire to be impossible, since there was no water source near the alleged training ground and the supposed host of the training, MILF base commander Samir Hashim, was ill and based in Buliok, scores of kilometres away (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2006).[12]

Two Filipino former generals who have had close contact with MILF leaders through the ongoing peace process claim that any MILF–JI link is 'peripheral, limited to individuals or small groups' and not involving 'the mainstream MILF which has shed such links, if any they had before.'[13] They likened the MILF to any large organization, such as the Armed Forces of the Philippines, which, too, has its recalcitrant members.

Underlying the suggestion that there are links between the MILF and al-Qaeda or JI is the assumption that there is a connection between al-Qaeda and JI in the first place. On the question of the existence of an al-Qaeda network in South-east Asia, Phar Kim Beng says:

> *it is one thing to affirm the existence of al-Qaeda and yet another to attest to its network. In fact, such a loose definition may even be paradoxical, as terrorist cells are by nature hyper-exclusive . . . Networks on the other hand imply swift exchange of information, even joint planning. But if such groups do indulge in these networking activities, their existence would be unduly compromised.* (Phar, 2003, p. 7)

Loosely applying the term 'terrorist network' carries the risk of implicating even the most incidental contact with al-Qaeda or JI operatives, including otherwise legitimate non-governmental organizations and individuals.

According to Sidney Jones of ICG, who has published extensively on the JI network in South-east Asia:

> *JI was never an al-Qaeda franchise; there were always parts of JI that objected to the bin Laden interpretation of jihad, at least as it applied to Southeast Asia . . . No one looking at JI after 2002 could reasonably conclude that its identity was bound up with bin Laden, and even during the period of closest ties [1997–2002], JI was very much an independent organization with its own agenda.* (Jones, 2005, p. 172)

JI's '*al-Qaeda* affiliate' label wrongly 'suggests that JI's use of violence is externally induced rather than an intrinsic part of the organization since its inception' (Jones, 2005, pp. 172–74). The ICG has also clarified in recent years that JI's focus 'continues to be on establishing an Islamic state in Indonesia', *not* 'a larger *daulah islamiyah nusantara* encompassing Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines' or some kind of South-east Asian caliphate (ICG, 2003, p. 1). The MILF and ASG, similarly, see their struggle as confined geographically to the southern Philippines.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that there appear to be no Filipinos among the members of JI, which include Indonesians, Singaporeans, and Malaysians (Jones, 2005, p. 175). JI is essentially an Indonesian organization with an Indonesian agenda. Its Darul Islam (DI)[14] roots date back to 1950s Indonesia, its spiritual leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir sees himself as the intellectual heir of DI, and many JI operatives come from families connected with the failed DI project (ICG, 2003, p. 29). Moreover, 'many Indonesians still question whether JI exists as a formal organization' at all (ICG, 2003, p. 29). Collier recently noted that JI 'has become a convenient shorthand for the terrorist threat in Indonesia' where non-JI 'freelance' jihadis are already the more 'immediate threat, to Western targets in particular' (Collier, 2006, p. 34).

All told, any MILF link with JI and al-Qaeda, especially the former hosting training camps for the latter, appears to be a thing of the past. The same may not be said of ASG links with al-Qaeda and JI. These connections do not appear to amount to a tight network comprising a centre and its affiliates but, rather, relationships among independent organizations with their own agendas. The groups link up to varying degrees at different junctures for 'mutual advantage and reciprocal assistance', to use ICG's description of JI's relationship with al-Qaeda (ICG, 2003, p. 30). As the accompanying case study of the ASG shows (see Chapter 5), the links are at most tactical alliances of convenience, more pragmatic than ideological, referred to in the vernacular as *gamitan* (using each other) or 'co-opting' each other, in the parlance of the counter-terrorism literature. To take a long-term view, such networks appear incidental rather than critical to Philippine insurgency and Mindanao rebellion.[15]

REWARD
MURDER, EXTORTION AND KIDNAPPING

A poster offering rewards from the US and Philippine governments for information leading to the capture of suspected terrorists hangs at the entrance way to a Philippine Army post on the island of Basilan in the southern Philippines, January 2007.
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## Defining terrorism: the question of terrorist organizations

The dangerous dynamics of terrorism (and counter-terrorism) are influenced by the discourse of definitions (of terrorism) and designations (of terrorist organizations). Wright-Neville's tentative typology of Islamist groups in Southeast Asia is a useful starting point in understanding the forces that drive the move from unarmed struggle to armed struggle and, ultimately, to terrorism (Wright-Neville, 2004). He has three categories, in order of increasing political alienation:

1. *Activists*—usually contain their action safely within the parameters of existing laws.
2. *Militants*—are more inclined to push past the boundaries of existing laws but with a self-limiting nature which reflects moral and ethical boundaries.
3. *Terrorists*—display no such self-limiting nature; leads to a moral disengagement that makes it easier to ignore the conventional distinction between combatant and non-combatant and to justify committing violence against a wider target population.

In terms of this classification, the MNLF and MILF are militant, and the ASG and JI are terrorist.

An immediate problem arises with the term 'militant', however. In other contexts, such as Kashmir or Gaza, it is almost synonymous with 'terrorist', or, at the very least, an armed rebel or insurgent.[16] A Malaysian academic writing on militant Islam in Malaysia uses 'militant' to denote the use of unlawful force and violent acts to achieve one's political objectives. Such acts either would create public fear or hatred against the perceived enemy of the perpetrating group or would result in public disorder, with possible detrimental effects on societal cohesion (Abdullah, 2001, p. 4). In the Philippines, however, 'militant' has a very different connotation, associated with the self-defined 'peaceful but militant, vigorous but non-violent' struggle of open and legal cause-oriented groups against the Marcos dictatorship. Today, it refers mainly to open and legal national-democratic organizations and activism associated with the leftist political coalition Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN). Interestingly, the term 'militant' has had almost no local application to the Moro struggles, whether to pre-martial law Moro student activism or to the MNLF and the MILF.

Potentially more dangerous are the associations that come with the word 'terrorism'. Wright-Neville's concept of 'terrorists' draws on the definition of terrorism in the US Criminal Code: 'premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups, or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience' (Wright-Neville, 2004, p. 30). This excludes states as subjects (perpetrators) of the violence. The US State Department and European Union (EU) definitions also limit the subject or perpetrator, for example, to 'sub-national groups'. As a result, there might be situations in which civilian targeting by one side is treated as terrorism, while civilian targeting by the other side is not.[17]

The emerging United Nations definition of terrorism, as paraphrased by former Secretary General Kofi Annan, is any action 'intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a Government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act' (Annan, 2005). This does not exclude states as subjects; as Annan says categorically, '[s]tates can be guilty of terrorism' (Annan, 2005). But he also addresses possible terrorism by national liberation movements: '[a]s for the right to resist occupation, it must be understood in its true meaning. It cannot include the right to deliberately kill or maim civilians' (Annan, 2005).

Our own definition, based on a number of sources and references, including international humanitarian law, is: the *systematic employment* by states, groups, or individuals of acts, or threats of violence, or use of weapons *deliberately targeting the civilian population*, individuals, or infrastructure for the primary purpose of *spreading terror or extreme fear among the civilian population in relation to some political or quasi-political objective* and undertaken *with an intended audience*. By systematic, we mean not just a few isolated terrorist acts but a *clear and consistent pattern, plan, or policy of terrorist acts or methods*, which makes it *a terrorist organization* (Santos, 2002, pp. 28–29).

The most important common denominator linking these various definitions is the targeting of non-combatants. Yet it is precisely this element which is missing in the new Philippine Anti-Terrorism Law, the Human Security Act.[18] This provides the potential for abuse by state authorities since it considerably widens the types of groups and individuals that could be deemed terrorists.

As Wright-Neville warns, 'too often anecdotal evidence has been taken out of context and used to demonize individuals and groups that do not meet most standard definitions of terrorism, even though such groups might see violence as an important part of their political strategy' (Wright-Neville, 2004, p. 30).

## Terrorist listings: the power of labels

The most prominent list of terrorist organizations and the one with the most far-reaching consequences is the US State Department's three-tiered list. The Philippine armed groups included are:

1. *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*—Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), New People's Army (CPP-NPA)[19]
2. *Terrorist Exclusion List*[20]—Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB), Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM), Pentagon Gang
3. *Other Terrorist Organizations*[21]—ABB, RSM

Based on local knowledge of these armed groups and on the aforementioned definitions of terrorism, including that of the US Criminal Code, only the ASG and the RSM can be correctly classified as terrorist organizations since only they resort to bombings of urban population centres, civilian transport, and passenger terminals. The Pentagon Gang is a criminal kidnap-for-ransom syndicate composed of former Moro rebels. The NPA does not have a record of systematically targeting civilians. The ABB in its heyday in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when it served as the NPA's urban guerrilla unit in metro Manila, conducted numerous assassination operations, mainly against police targets and some US military personnel, but for the past few years has been engaged in a peace process and ceasefire with the Philippine government. Recent hostilities involving the group—now RPA-ABB following a merger with a fellow NPA offshoot—have tended to be with the rival NPA rather than with any other armed force; the group does not have a record of systematically targeting civilians.

The listing of the NPA as a terrorist group, not only by the United States but also by the European Union, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia in 2002, was particularly controversial, since it led directly to the suspension of peace talks by the National Democratic Front (NDFP), the NPA's political counterpart (see Chapter 1). The NPA has been the most avowedly anti-US imperialist among the Philippine armed groups, although, unlike the ASG and the MILF, it has no Islamic connection that could possibly link it to al-Qaeda or JI.

Since the Marcos dictatorship, long before this US list was first drawn up in 1997, the Philippine government often referred to the NPA as 'communist terrorists' or 'dissident terrorists' and to the MNLF and the MILF as 'Muslim terrorists' or 'secessionist terrorists'. There is no doubt that certain NPA practices could be considered acts of terrorism—and violations of international humanitarian law—since they deliberately target individual civilians or private property for certain security, punitive, or coercive fund-raising purposes, though they are not intended to terrorize the population (Asia Watch, 1990). The practice of liquidating civilian informers and other 'bad elements' (e.g. cattle rustlers, rapists, and other criminals) is an obvious example. Also questionable are the more recent NPA practices of 'revolutionary taxation' and attacks on civilian infrastructure (usually linked to businesses that refuse to pay 'revolutionary taxes').

But the overall historical record of the NPA in its conduct of armed struggle shows that it has neither as a general policy nor as a general practice engaged in terrorism or acts of terrorism by deliberately targeting civilians to spread terror among or intimidate the civilian population. This would go against its strategy of building a wide and deep peasant mass base in the countryside as the main political requirement for rural guerrilla warfare (PHDR, 2005).

This same conclusion was reached in 1996 by US counter-Maoist insurgency expert Thomas A. Marks, who detected the use of terror by the NPA to maintain the insurgent infrastructure in its guerrilla fronts but stated the actions 'have not yet become terrorism' (Marks, 1996, p. 168). Should they become so, 'it would indicate the death of the insurgency' (Marks, 1996, pp. 151–73). Marks differentiates between *terrorism* and *terror*. It is not the means—which are often similar in form—but the ends that differentiate the two: terrorism is small group violence in pursuit of certain political goals, usually to send an intended message; terror is undertaken by members of an insurgent movement (implying mass recruitment) to maintain its political infrastructure.

A second terrorist listing is the Terrorism Knowledge Base (TKB) of the US National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism. It draws heavily on the databases of the US think tank RAND Corporation. The TKB in June 2006 listed the following as terrorist organizations in the Philippines: Abdurajak Janjalani Brigade (AJB), ASG, ABB, Free Vietnam Revolutionary Group, Indigenous People's Federal Army (IPFA), JI, Kabataang Makabayan (KM), Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM), MILF, MNLF, NPA, People's Revolutionary Front, RSM, Rebolusyonaryong Hukbong Bayan (RHB), and al-Qaeda. The most notable difference with the US State Department's list is the inclusion of the MILF and the MNLF, which are Moro rebel groups, not terrorist organizations (see MILF and MNLF group profiles in Part Two). Also additional are the AJB, an alternative name coined by the military for the ASG; the Free Vietnam Revolutionary Group and the People's Revolutionary Front, which, if they ever existed, have long become defunct; and the largely inactive IPFA. JI, KMM, and al-Qaeda are also included, even though they are not Filipino organizations and do not have known Filipino members. KM is the underground but essentially unarmed youth affiliate of the National Democratic Front (the political wing of the CPP), while RHB is a Communist rebel group that broke away from and is currently engaged in active hostilities with the NPA (PHDR, 2005).

## Terrorism and the peace process with the MILF

The information and misinformation outlined above has fed into post-9/11 anti-terrorism policy. In the Philippines, this started with President Arroyo's October 2001 Memorandum Order No. 37 providing for a 14-pillar anti-terrorism policy which 'in the main, emphasizes military measures. Fundamental grievances, such as Moro landlessness, poverty, unemployment, widespread discrimination and Catholic militia abuses remain unaddressed' (Tan, 2003, p. 111). This period coincided with a slowdown in the peace negotiations with the MILF. In December 2003, Arroyo was widely reported in the media as stating that the government would not allow the peace process to stand in the way of the overriding fight against terrorism. A number of analysts and commentators have expressed similar lines of thinking, which indicate that the anti-terrorism paradigm is threatening the viability of various peace processes:

- 'From these intelligence reports, it is very clear Jemaah Islamiyah and al-Qaeda have a solid presence in the Philippines. Yet the government, in its peace talks, continues to offer autonomy to the MILF in its stronghold' (Ressa, 2003, p. 140).
- 'And it is these [MILF–JI] bonds that now present perhaps the most serious obstacle to a peace agreement in the southern Philippines' (ICG, 2004, p. 13).
- 'A central paradox of the southern Philippines peace process is that it presents both the main short-term obstacle to rooting out the terrorist network, and an indispensable element in any long-term remedy' (ICG, 2004, p. 5).

The problem with the 'war on terror' approach is its focus on terrorism to the neglect of other issues. It is programmed to look for, find, and neutralize terrorists and terrorist links. When a link to a group is found, or thought to exist on the basis of intelligence reports, the logic of the war on terror is to downgrade peace negotiations with the group in favour of military offensives or 'all-out war'. Thus, the militarization of the response to terrorism (for example, the approach to the ASG) soon extends to the militarization of the response to rebellion (such as by the MILF and the NPA).[22]

The allegation of links between the MILF and the JI has led to delays in the peace negotiations with the MILF in the recent past. The issue was not on the substantive agenda of the talks but has affected the trust and confidence of both sides in the process. The government was worried that the MILF was hedging its bets by 'maintain[ing] military capacity and international *jihadist* solidarity at the same time as they negotiate', playing the JI card to 'bring new international urgency to solving the southern Philippines conflict' (ICG, 2004, p. 26). But the MILF does not need the JI for military build-up, much less for peace negotiations and diplomatic work. Indeed, the JI is a liability for the latter purposes and, in terms of military infrastructure, it is the JI that needs the MILF for its infrastructure in Central Mindanao.

The claim in early 2005 that 'JI's strategic base [main training ground and refuge of key JI leaders] has now shifted to the Philippines' hinges on its access to the infrastructure of MILF camps in Central Mindanao, the evidence for which, as already mentioned, has so far not been compelling (Ressa, 2005, pp. 16–17). In late 2005, the ICG stated that the MILF 'is distancing itself from partnership' with the JI (ICG, 2005, p. 1).

The MILF renounced terrorism and terrorist links in June 2003 when MILF *imam* Salamat Hashim stated a few weeks before his death that:

> *[t]here can be no more strong ground for the MILF to condemn terrorism than that it is anathema to the teachings of Islam. To stress seriously this point, I hereby reiterate our condemnation and abhorrence of terroristic tendencies in order to eschew the reverse side of the language of endemic state violence. Consequently, we reject and deny any link with terrorist organizations or activities in this part of the Asian region, particularly in South Philippines, and elsewhere in the world.* (Hashim, 2005, pp. 8–9)

The government understandably wanted validation of this renunciation of terrorism. Such validation came in the form of MILF–AFP intelligence cooperation and joint action in the interdiction of criminal and terrorist elements. Also important is the close personal interaction of counterparts in the peace talks and in maintaining the ceasefire. A Filipino army general said there is a 'certain honour among warriors' that makes it possible to gauge the sincerity of the other, adding that he believes the mainstream MILF is 'negotiating on a sincere basis', having 'shed terrorist links, if they had [them] before'.[23] In the final analysis, it is the Philippine government's perceptions of MILF sincerity (in contrast to what it perceives as the insincerity of the NDFP) that has prevented it from endorsing any US attempt to blacklist the MILF.

Some counter-terrorism experts have altered their thinking about the MILF and now talk of a 'need to move forward with the peace process', albeit as 'one way to de-radicalize these groups'[24] rather than because there is a centuries-old Bangsamoro problem to be solved. In the short term, 'attempts to move directly against terrorists embedded in MILF-controlled [or influenced] territory', such as the successful AFP air strike against the Pentagon Gang in August 2004, are best done in the context of peace process-inspired cooperation (ICG, 2004). In the long term, 'without a successful peace agreement, the region will continue to be marked by a climate of lawlessness in which terrorism can thrive', especially if the conditions that give rise to terrorism are not addressed (ICG, 2004). In sum, the peace process can provide collateral benefits for the war on terror, even as this is not and should not be the main objective of the peace process.

The reverse does not seem to be the case. A consequence of the government's anti-terrorism campaign has been an escalation in human rights violations, especially against the Muslim minority community. It has also led to an aggravation of long-standing Christian majority discrimination against Muslims (Malang n.d.).

Acts of terrorism by so-called rogue MILF commanders during renewed hostilities following the breakdown in the peace negotiations in August 2008 have again led the government to consider adding these commanders, if not the entire MILF organization, to its 'terrorist' list (Dizon, 2008). This could involve the first test implementation of the proscription of terrorist '*organizations or 'group(s) of persons'* under the Philippine Human Security Act of 2007. But this law has no provision for the proscription of terrorist *individuals*. A greater problem, however, is that the very definition of terrorism in this law is not in accord with the international law on terrorism and has been challenged on constitutional grounds in a case that at this writing was pending before the Philippine Supreme Court.[25] What is needed is a good legal definition of terrorism, and a law that *distinguishes between terrorist individuals and insurgent (but non-terrorist) organizations*, especially when the former are members of the latter.

The August 2008 breakdown in the peace process represents a setback not only for this process but for counter-terrorism efforts more broadly. One possible consequence is that the MILF could renege on its agreement to share intelligence on terrorists. Another is that the downturn of events could reinforce doubts among the more radical MILF elements about the peace negotiations and drive them to consider more drastic options, including tactical alliances with terrorist groups. Finally, if the mainstream MILF or its leadership is somehow compelled to pursue war—though not necessarily terrorism—because its preferred 'Peace Path' becomes unviable, then a war situation will provide more favourable conditions for terrorism.

## Terrorism and the peace process with the NDFP

The global war on terror has also added fuel to the Philippine government's counter-insurgency war against the NPA. This conflict has been framed as a counter-terrorist war, especially following the US decision in August 2002 to list the CPP, NPA, and NDFP leader Jose Maria Sison (believed to be the CPP Chairman) as 'terrorists'. The Arroyo administration has taken advantage of this listing, as shown by Arroyo's order for redeployment of the AFP against the NPA in August 2002 (renewed in June 2006)[26] and by the 'Nine-Point Guidelines Issued by the President Re: the CPP'[27] which include:

2. The CPP-NPA has engaged in terrorist acts against civilian targets . . . as part of the overall aim to overthrow the duly constituted government and the democratic system;
4. The government welcomes the action of the US declaring the CPP-NPA as a terrorist organization; this is not interference in the internal affairs of the Philippines;
6. The government will maintain open lines of communication with the CPP-NPA in the hope of ending the employment of violence and terrorism as a means to attain political ends, and to achieve national unity and reconciliation under the Constitution;
7. There is no ceasefire between the government and the CPP-NPA; military and police operations will continue;
8. The government calls on other communist organizations that are not engaged in unlawful acts to condemn the violence and terrorism being perpetrated by the CPP-NPA;
9. The government calls upon the entire citizenry to get involved in the fight against the CPP-NPA . . .

Sison instantly reciprocated with a call for 'all-out resistance' against the 'US-directed Macapagal-Arroyo regime', and to strengthen 'all types of alliances to isolate and remove the Macapagal-Arroyo ruling clique' (Sison, 2003). In August 2004 the NDFP suspended peace talks with the government on the grounds that the government had failed to comply with its confidence-building commitment to take effective measures towards the lifting of the foreign terrorist listings. In so doing, it jettisoned more than a decade of on–off peace talks with the government, and effectively allowed the peace process to be held hostage to a policy decision of foreign sovereign entities. The CPP in its December 2004 anniversary statement said the NPA 'is now trying to develop the ability to make and use . . . rocket-propelled grenades, improvised explosive devices, mortars and other close range weapons.'[28]

The Nine-Point Guidelines make clear that the Arroyo government put military action above peace negotiations in dealing with the CPP-NPA, which it treats as a terrorist rather than a Communist organization. They make no mention of peace negotiations. Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, then Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, tried to soften the Guidelines:

> *On the issue of terrorist groups, government has adopted a policy of not dealing or negotiating with such criminal groups whose main motivation is neither political, ideological or religious. Therefore, such groups as the Abu Sayyaf, the Pentagon and other kidnap-for-ransom bands are dealt with through military and police operations. Recently however, the government has had to review this policy in the light of the U.S. State Department's recent designation of the CPP-NPA as a foreign terrorist organization . . .* (Ermita, 2002, emphasis added)
>
> *The U.S.' action must be seen in the context of the U.S. role in spearheading the global campaign against terrorism and of the CPP-NPA issue as an internal matter which must be addressed through our own internal policy. In a 9-point policy guide on dealing with this issue, the government stated that while it condemns the acts of the CPP-NPA which constitute terrorist acts and demands that these acts cease immediately, open communication lines however shall continue to be maintained in pursuance of the peace efforts with the said organization.* (Ermita, 2002, emphasis added)

This suggests that a small window of opportunity was left open for advocates of peace negotiations rather than military action to deal with the major rebel groups. In practice, however, it appears that the hardliners in the cabinet, following Arroyo's lead, are winning the policy debate. As in the case of the MILF, the campaign against terrorism is leading to a militarized response not only to terrorism but also to rebellion and internal armed conflict. The counter-terrorism paradigm has reinforced an already dominant ideology of national security, which favours counter-insurgency as the framework with which to address insurgency or rebellion. The peace process itself has been subsumed under the national security framework, since the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process is answerable to the Cabinet Oversight Committee on Internal

Security.[29] In June 2006, President Arroyo issued an 'all-out war' order to the security forces to crush the NPA 'in two years', with US anti-terrorist logistics support to the AFP (Avendano, 2006).

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to present an analysis infused with local knowledge of Philippine armed groups that serves as a critique of the dominant anti-terrorism analysis and discourse. It shows that the hegemonic 'global war on terror' perspective fails properly to consider specific and complex local and contextual variables.[30] Contrary to the dominant view, there is no tight umbrella terrorist network in South-east Asia involving al-Qaeda or Jemaah Islamiyah that encompasses all armed Muslim groups in the region. Any linkages that groups internal to the region or to a particular country have with external groups are loose and incidental rather than critical to their operations. This is especially so in the Philippines. The most influential (i.e. US) definitions, designations, and listings of terrorist organizations are inaccurate, outdated, subjective, and susceptible to be used as instruments for power politics, globally and locally.

A major casualty of the dominant approach is the quest for a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace that addresses the root causes of internal armed conflicts. And because aspects of this quest are tied up with the root causes of terrorism, the legitimate fight against terrorism loses ground strategically even if it seems to have gained ground tactically. Rebellions, such as those of the MILF and the NDFP, are treated as terrorism. The mainly military and anti-negotiation approach to terrorism is applied, with much collateral damage, to long-standing social rebellions that are better addressed through conflict resolution and peace-building approaches. Thus, the dominant anti-terrorism paradigm has not only become an obstacle to peace processes but has added fuel to various internal armed conflicts.

The key insight gained from the Philippine case is the need to distinguish decades-old socially based rebellion and insurgency from post-11 September terrorism. This distinction is evident from close examination of the armed groups concerned, such as this overview provides in the cases of the MNLF and NPA, and as Chapter 5 provides in the case of the ASG. A recent report by the ICG makes a valuable distinction between terrorists and insurgencies:

> *Terrorists deliberately and systematically target civilians in pursuit of non-negotiable goals, and score relatively low on the other two indices [possession of political infrastructure; and control of population and territory] reflecting their lack of legitimacy. Insurgent movements with negotiable demands, political infrastructure, popular constituencies and territorial control are less likely to depend on terrorist tactics and are more readily held to account for their actions, especially when engaged in peace processes.* (ICG, 2008, p. 2)

The ICG report also takes a look at the respective support bases of terrorists and insurgencies:

> *Mass-based insurgencies like the MILF and MNLF rely on supportive populations. By extension, small numbers of terrorists rely on sympathetic insurgents. Counter-terrorism's central task in a setting like that in the Philippines is to isolate jihadis from their insurgent hosts—not divide insurgents from the population. [. . .] Collapsing terrorists and insurgents in the Philippines into a single category is as dangerous as conflating insurgents with their support base—the military tactics that often follow reinforce bonds rather than break them.* (ICG, 2008, pp. i, 20)

This is a point we have long been making. It highlights the need for a more accurate and nuanced alternative to the dominant anti-terrorism analysis and discourse.

## Endnotes

1 This point was made in a commentary on an early draft of this chapter by Dr. Timo Kivimaki, Senior Researcher, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, on 25 July 2006.

2 Comment by Eduardo Marino, field consultant and campaigner, Bogotá, Colombia, on 24 August 2006.

3 An 'Islamist' is an adherent to the belief that Islam should form the basis of political ideology who works for the Islamization of political institutions and the whole society. See, for example, Barton (2005, pp. 28–29).

4 Represented mainly in the writings and discourse of Rohan Gunaratna, Zachary Abuza, Maria A. Ressa, Angel Rabasa, and the RAND Corporation, and, to a lesser extent, in the research and reports of Kit Collier, Sidney Jones, and the International Crisis Group.

5 Represented by the scholarly work of Andrew Tan, Mark Turner, Dwight Wright-Neville, Natasha Hamilton-Hart, Michael K. Connors, Julkipli M. Wadi, and Timo Kivimaki. Rommel C. Banlaoi's work is for the most part located somewhere between this and the previous grouping.

6 Comment made on an early draft of this chapter by Prof. Andrew T. H. Tan, Senior Lecturer, King's College, University of London and Joint Services Command and Staff College, UK (now with University of New South Wales-Asia in Singapore), on 12 July 2006.

7 Collier identifies Rohan Gunaratna as a globalist, Zachary Abuza and David Wright-Neville as regionalists, and Natasha Hamilton-Hart as a country specialist. He attributes the identification of these three ways of looking at terrorism in South-east Asia to Carlyle A. Thayer.

8 Philippine Police Colonel Rodolfo 'Boogie' Mendoza, quoted in Ressa (2003, pp. 11, 132). Mendoza's unpublished book *Philippine Jihad Inc.* (2002) was a major reference for Ressa's book.

9 One high-profile police raid of an alleged Islamic terrorist front organization resulting in the arrest of 17 suspected terrorists in Manila in January 2005 was based on intelligence reports that turned out to be mistaken or inadequate. Fifteen of those arrested were released for lack of evidence, a congressional investigation was undertaken, and the main police officer concerned was sacked. See Esguerra (2005).

10 Comment by Marino on an early draft of this chapter.

11 The attribution is to Rohan Gunaratna, who made the same point at the 'Meeting on Mindanao' on 9 June 2006 at the National Defense College of the Philippines, Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

12 Lt. Gen. Rodolfo R. Garcia, AFP (Ret.)- and Undersecretary Ramon G. Santos, in reactions to Gunaratna, at the 'Meeting on Mindanao' on 9 June 2006 at the National Defense College of the Philippines. See also the Bantay Ceasefire field report on Camp Cararao and Buliok Islamic Center based on field monitoring conducted on 6 November and 9–10 December 2003.

13 Lt. Gen. Rodolfo R. Garcia, AFP (Ret.)- and Undersecretary Ramon G. Santos, in reactions to Gunaratna, at the 'Meeting on Mindanao' on 9 June 2006 at the National Defense College of the Philippines.

14 For more information about DI, see the armed group profile on JI.

15 Comment by Julkipli M. Wadi, Institute of Islamic Studies, University of the Philippines, on 25 September 2006.

16 In contrast to 'terrorist', a 'rebel' or 'insurgent' might be defined as a member of a rebel or an insurgent group, which, in turn, are groups engaged in rebellion or insurgency. At least in the Philippine context, rebellion or insurgency connotes long-standing home-grown social or sectoral grievances that have taken the form of a mass armed struggle and movement against the national or central authority.

17 Comment by Dr. Kivimaki on an early draft of this chapter.

18 Republic Act No. 9372, approved on 6 March 2007. The Act includes the phrase 'thereby sowing and creating a condition of widespread and extraordinary fear and panic among the populace' with reference to terrorist acts as an incidental outcome; there is no element in the law which states that such is the purpose of terrorism. The only element of purpose indicated in the Act is 'to coerce the government to give in to an unlawful demand'. Nor is there an element of intention to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or to make civilians the object of attack or to target civilians deliberately.

19 See <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>.

20 Section 411 of the USA PATRIOT ACT of 2001 (8 U.S.C. § 1182) authorizes the Secretary of State, in consultation with or upon the request of the Attorney General, to designate organizations as terrorist for immigration purposes. Individuals associated with any of the entities on the TEL can be excluded from entering the United States. See <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/des/123086.htm> for the list drafted in 2004.

21 OTO includes groups of concern that have not been designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations under 8 US Code Section 1189, but may have been designated under other US Government counter-terrorism authorities. The list was consulted on 9 October 2007 at <http://www.nctc.gov/site/other/oto.html>.

22 On the militarization of terrorism, see Howen (2002).

23 Lt. Gen. Rodolfo R. Garcia, AFP (Ret.), in reaction to Rohan Gunaratna, at the 'Meeting on Mindanao' on 9 June 2006 at the National Defense College of the Philippines. Also Lt. Gen. Rodolfo R. Garcia, AFP (Ret.), interview by Soliman M. Santos, Jr. on 23 June 2006 in Pasig City.

24 Gunaratna, remarks at the 'Meeting on Mindanao' on 9 June 2006.

25 The lead among six consolidated cases is *Southern Hemisphere Engagement Network, Inc., at al. vs. Anti-Terrorism Council, et al.*, G.R. No. 178552, filed in July 2007.

26 Press Briefing of Secretary Ignacio Bunye, 5 August 2002, from the Office of the Press Secretary.

27 As published in the *Philippine Star*, 14 August 2002.

28 Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines, 'Avail of the Worsening Crisis and Intensify the Guerrilla Offensives to Advance the New Democratic Revolution.' 26 December 2004 (36th Anniversary Statement).

29 President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Executive Order No. 21, 'Creating a Coordinative and Integrative System on Internal Security', 19 June 2001.

30 Comment by Tan on an early draft of this chapter.

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## CHAPTER 5

# Abu Sayyaf Reloaded: Rebels, Agents, Bandits, Terrorists (Case Study)

### Soliman M. Santos, Jr. and Octavio A. Dinampo

## Introduction

As our title suggests, Al-Harakatul Islamiyya ('Islamic movement'), better known as the Abu Sayyaf Group ('father' or 'bearer of the sword', ASG), is difficult to define. It is a prime example of an armed group metamorphosing or shape-shifting over time. In terms of current popular culture, the group consists of the 'X-men' in the 'matrix' of the Moro armed groups in Mindanao and Sulu, and has been variously characterized as an 'enigma', 'Rashomon-like', and 'postmodern' (Collier, 2004; David, 2000, p. 7). Australian academic Kit Collier, reviewing some of the related literature on the ASG, notes (Collier, 2004):

> *Aside from being labeled 'international terrorists,' they have also been described as 'Muslim bandits,' 'social bandits,' 'outlaws with an agenda' (Frake, 1998), 'new entrepreneurs in violence . . . neither rebel nor revolutionary' (Gutierrez, 2000), a 'revolutionary group' fighting for an Islamic state (Quimpo, 1999), a 'splinter group' or 'dirty tricks' division of the MNLF or MILF, or even the AFP, and a 'CIA creation' (Iqbal, 2003).*

The different labels applied to the ASG vary according to points of view and points in time and, as Collier points out, 'these seemingly contradictory interpretations may actually become mutually reinforcing, reproducing the cycle of conflict while serving underlying material interests on various "sides"' (Collier, 2004). Even the top ASG commander in Sulu had this to say recently: 'That's indeed frightening if we can no longer be classified [correctly].'[1] This case study looks, in turn, at the four interpretations in the title: rebels, agents, bandits, and terrorists, the origins of which, broadly speaking, follow the trajectory of the group.

## Rebels: MNLF, not al-Qaeda, origins

A number of scholars and journalists, particularly counter-terrorism specialists usually citing police intelligence sources rather than their own eyewitness accounts, say al-Qaeda sponsored the formation of the ASG as its contact and support group in the Philippines. They say it started in the summer of 1991 in Peshawar, Pakistan, where Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law Mohammed Jamal Khalifa and al-Qaeda bomb master Ramzi Yousef (the mastermind behind the World Trade Center bombing of February 1993) befriended and recruited the ASG's Filipino founder, Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani. Janjalani had travelled to Afghanistan to serve the *mujahideen* ('holy warriors') against Soviet occupation. He is said to have named his group after a mentor of his there, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a legendary Afghan mujahid and founder of the Afghan Islamic movement (Abuza, 2002, pp. 439–41; Ressa, 2003, p. 107). It was as though the ASG's jihad in Mindanao had been 'imported from Al-Qaeda' (Collier, 2004).

The ASG's preferred name of Al-Harakatul Al-Islamiyya (Islamic Movement), written in Arabic on a propaganda poster for the group, 2002. © Courtesy of Rommel C. Banlaoi

But even one of the proponents of this theory notes that '[t]en leading MNLF officials joined Janjalani, including Ustadz Wahab Akbar and Abdul Asmad' (Abuza, 2002, p. 440). This Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) connection is pivotal to understanding the group. Filipino scholars and journalists trace the formation of the ASG to the disenchantment of members of the MNLF. Younger MNLF cadres and their Moro youth base, in particular, were unhappy with its unproductive peace negotiation efforts under the leadership of Chairman Nur Misuari. Janjalani began to question Misuari's leadership openly in 1986 and was sent by the group to Libya a year later to 'cool off'. His four years of schooling at an Islamic *dakwah* (missionary work) university (Qulliyyatul Da'wa) in Tripoli had the opposite effect, however. While there (and not in Afghanistan), he persuaded three fellow Moros to form a breakaway group informed by the Islamic concept of jihad which he felt the MNLF had failed to appropriate for the Moro struggle (Vitug, 2000, pp. 204–06, 211–12; Wadi, 2003a, pp. 16, 19).[2]

Janjalani's time in Afghanistan does seem to have left his mark on him, and, consequently, the ASG. He appeared to emulate Afghan Islamic movement founder Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, made personal contacts with key al-Qaeda personalities who would later bring the ASG into the international terrorist loop, and, no doubt, brought some of what he learned during this period into his later Islamic jihadist preaching to the ASG. Yet the importance of his Afghan stint should not be overstated; the ASG is, in its origins and historical development, essentially a home-grown organization. One Filipino Muslim scholar, Professor Julkipli M. Wadi, who has been studying Janjalani's work, rejects the notion that he went there at all, arguing that the journey was fabricated 'to make the man appear what he is not'.[3]

Janjalani left the MNLF and established Al-Harakatul Islamiyya upon his return to the Philippines in mid-1989 'as a vehicle to be used once more for an independent country, national identity and most of all Islam—meaning, an Islamic state for the Bangsamoro'.[4] In a public proclamation, he outlined the ASG's ultimate goal: establishing a pure Islamic government through a necessary war to seek *kaadilan* (justice) for the Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu (Tan, 1995, p. 96). With the exception of the heavy accent on Islam, the other key terms—*kaadilan*, *bangsa* (nation or Moro), *hulah* (homeland or Minsupala), and *agama* (religion or Islam)—are all MNLF terms. This early proclamation declared that the aim of the ASG was to serve as a bridge between the MNLF and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rather than as a new faction in the Muslim struggle, which it later became (Tan, 1995).

The core Al-Harakatul Islamiyya founders (including two of Janjalani's brothers, Hector and Khadaffy) agreed to concentrate first on the Zamboanga-Basilan-Sulu-Tawi Tawi (Zambasulta) region for recruitment and other preparatory activities. This determined the basic Moro ethnic mix of the ASG: Yakan, Tausug, and Sama. Within two years, however, the Tausugs of Sulu—the same main ethnic group of the MNLF—would predominate in the ASG leadership.[5] The fourth ASG founder, Wahab Akbar, a Yakan, did not take well to the Tausug predominance, breaking away from the ASG and later fighting it when he became the governor of Basilan.[6] Former MNLF commanders who opposed the peace talks also had a strong presence within the ASG leadership.

Although the ASG and the MNLF officially reject each other, Radullan Sahiron, long-standing ASG chief in Sulu, states, 'we don't have a quarrel with the MNLF which likewise has the same objective'.[7] Khadaffy Janjalani adds:

> *[a]s a matter of fact, we even want to serve as one of the pillars of the MNLF, this explains why so many former MNLF commanders were taken in by Al-Harakatul Islamiyya. If there is a slight gap, it is in the means of achieving the purpose—for us, it's through independence; for the MNLF, it's through autonomy.*[8]

Similarly, many members of the MNLF mass base and some of its leaders in Sulu view Sahiron and Gumbahali Abu Jumdail, popularly known as 'Dr. Abu', as lifelong freedom fighters who have acted consistently with the MNLF motto 'Victory or the Graveyard'.[9]

In sum, the ASG is indigenous, not imported. Like the MNLF and the MILF, the ASG has taken up arms with a Moro separatist or secessionist agenda against the Philippine government, though, unlike the MNLF and the MILF, it has never vacillated in its demands for independence rather than autonomy and has resorted to extremist means. Yet it carries the genes of the two major tracts of the contemporary Moro struggle, as a nationalist movement (like the MNLF) and as an Islamic movement (like the MILF) (Wadi, 1999, p. 10; 2003b, pp. 117–21).

## Islamic jihadism

ASG's name for itself is Al Harakatul Islamiyya, Arabic for 'Islamic movement'.[10] To be more specific, it is an Islamic revivalist movement. One aspect of this version of Islam is the search for a return to the fundamentals of Islam by way of strict adherence to it in its purest form as laid down in the *Qu'ran* (its Holy Book) and the *Hadith* (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), without innovations (Mercado, 1994, p. 5; 1999, pp. 141–60). Another aspect is the quest to revive Islam's former glory as a once pre-eminent religion and civilization that has been eclipsed by Western colonialism, modernism, and secularism. The renewed impetus to bring this revival into the realm of politics and governance was provided by Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution and reinforced by the jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, which also served as a venue for practical exposure for many young Moro rebels. Indeed, like Afghan anti-Soviet jihad, the ASG's jihad is primarily a struggle to resist occupation and oppressive rule by 'infidel forces' in the group's homeland, rather than a transnational struggle, as advocated by al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah ideologues. The ASG aspires to an Islamic state in the whole of Mindanao, not just its Muslim regions, but this aspiration does not extend beyond the Philippines.

That the early ASG had an ideology lends support to the view that it had a rebel, or even a revolutionary, character. Its brand of political Islam fits such Islamist taxonomical categories as 'Revolutionary Sunni' and '*Mujaddidist*' (restorer or renewer of the faith) (Dekmejian, 1988, pp. 10–16). Still, Janjalani would assert that the ASG's struggle was a jihad, not a revolution in the mould of the MNLF's Bangsamoro revolution. Critical for Janjalani was the following of the Qur'anic word of Allah, not the thoughts of Marx, Lenin, Mao, or any other man (Gloria and Vitug, 2000, p. 212). If it was ever a revolution, it had to be an Islamic revolution, as pioneered in Iran. Janjalani rejected the path of negotiations early on, declaring that his own *fatwa* (ruling) that *jihad qitaal* (political struggle-cum-war against the enemy) is a *fard ayn* (personal obligation) of Muslims in Mindanao (Wadi, 1996).

Janjalani left at least eight recorded ideological *khutbah* (lectures) outlining a radical framework based on the Qur'anic theory of *jihad fi sabilillah* (struggle in the cause of Allah). They reflect a more radical version of Islamic revivalism than that of the MILF, notwithstanding the common influence on them of such Islamic revivalist pioneers as the *imam* (religio-political leaders) Shafi'i, Sayyid Qutb, Sayyid Abu A'la Mawdudi, and Ibn Taymiyah. Janjalani is selectively emphatic about the Qur'anic and prophetic tradition of jihad.[11] His interpretation of Islamic sources is characterized by a 'deconstruction' of the passive *ta'wil* (a purely spiritual and non-political interpretation) of jihad. It is interesting to note that, while the MILF imam Salamat Hashim called for a jihad only after the Estrada government's declaration of 'all-out war' in the summer of 2000, Janjalani and the ASG have been waging jihad continuously since 1991.

A further difference between the wars of the MILF and those of the ASG is their definition of the enemy, in particular their distinction (or failure to distinguish) between combatants and civilians. For the ASG, the *satruh* (enemy) responsible for the Muslim problem in Mindanao is considered to be not only Philippine soldiers but also non-combatants, both Christian and Muslim, who disagree with their version of jihad qitaal (Wadi, 2003a, p. 18). Janjalani's first khutbah identifies the enemy as Jews and Christians who will never accept the Qur'an, Muslims who do not read the Qur'an, and the 'sick *ulama* (Islamic scholars)' who quarrel with the Qur'an (Tan, 1995, p. 97). Eventually, Janjalani would lump the Philippine state, the Christian church, local and transnational corporations, traditional politicians, and even politically passive Muslims with the enemy (Wadi, 2003a, p. 18). This explains the ASG's anti-Christian attacks and its tendency to foment sectarian Muslim–Christian violence (Abuza, 2005).

Extreme prejudice is shown in the willingness not only to kill but also to die. Abdurajak Janjalani once taunted the military in an open letter stating: 'We are willing to die more than you desire to live' (Balana, 2006). This willingness to die for the cause is also shared by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) cadres, though neither the ASG nor the New People's Army (NPA) has resorted to suicide bombing. Suicide bombing can be ruled out for the NPA (as an 'unnecessary sacrifice' per Mao) but not for the ASG. Indeed, Janjalani exploits the *shaheed* (martyr) syndrome with its promise of paradise (Wadi, 1998, p. 40). Moreover, there is a precedent of sorts in the Tausug practice of *parang sabil*, a form of jihad used during colonial times involving a ritualized suicidal frontal charge at the enemy with a native sword. Of course, a willingness to die does not necessarily translate into a willingness to undertake suicide bombings: the cultural factors—which, in the Philippines, continue to exert a far greater impact on group identity and behaviour than Islamist ideology—and the level of ideological indoctrination necessary to produce a suicide bomber are not yet found in or around the ASG.

Unlike with the NPA and the MILF, archetypal rebel groups, concern to win the hearts and minds of the people for popular mass support is less important to the ASG than what it believes is the correct 'straight path', since it is more an elite organization than a mass movement (Abuza, 2002, p. 34). As David Tucker describes, writing about religious terrorist groups, in general:

> *they are not constrained by the fear that excessive violence will offend some constituency, since they care only about a small circle of the elect . . . For religious terrorists, the world is divided into 'us' and 'them', the saved and the damned, and the damned are to be destroyed.* (Tucker, 2001, pp. 2–3)

These are not your usual rebels; these are Islamic jihadis or mujahideen. Interestingly, an early name associated with the ASG was '*Mujahideen* Commando Freedom Fighters (MCFF)'.[12]

## Agents: questions of military creation and collusion

Since the mid-1990s, the ASG has faced the charge that it is a creation of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) or even of the US Central Intelligence Agency. This has been categorically denied, most recently by Khadaffy Janjalani, who stated: 'To repeat, our organization is Al-Harakatul Islamiyya, not ASG. If they refer to their own ASG, that may be true. But if they are referring to Al-Harakatul Islamiyya, that's a lie.'[13]

The MNLF in Sulu suspects that the AFP created the ASG as a fifth column on the Moro rebel front to foment trouble and thus justify increased troop levels and funding for the AFP (in addition to a cut of ransom money paid for the release of ASG kidnapping victims) and as a way of 'generating support from a fearful public who would award legitimacy to the AFP to pursue extreme courses of violent action' (Turner, 1995, p. 17). The MNLF states that the AFP claims those it kills to be ASG members, even if they are not.[14] After the AFP linked (or confused) the MNLF in Sulu with the ASG during hostilities in 2005 (see Chapter 3), it began treating its supposed partners in peace, the MNLF, as 'lawless elements' to be destroyed.

Islamic studies professor Julkipli Wadi, who has carried out the most extensive academic study of the ASG, says, '[a]nother reason the Abu Sayyaf still exists is that government has practically allowed [it] to play a "contradictory role" in Philippine politics for the past 10 years. While the Abu Sayyaf is "taking hostage" the long-term interest of the Philippines, the Abu Sayyaf is "servicing" the AFP's short-term interest' in attaining budgetary funds, US military assistance, and reward money from the Philippines or US governments (Wadi, 2003a, p. 19).

One view is that the ASG was nurtured by state agencies to encourage the MNLF to negotiate for autonomy. Intentionally or not, the ASG threat pressured both President Fidel V. Ramos and MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari to accelerate their peace negotiations. To fend off any potential pull by the ASG on the MNLF's rank and file, Misuari would be pressured to seize the opportunity of power-sharing, with its attendant autonomous offices, jobs, and other benefits (Turner, 2003, p. 394). Other Muslim scholars suggest that smaller groups, such as the ASG, serve the interests of the larger MNLF because they create confusion, which puts pressure on the government to speed up negotiations with the MNLF (Arguillas, 1994, p. 10). Thus, the government and the MNLF may have been using the ASG card against one another.

Although the ASG is not an actual creation of the military, there has been a history of military-fielded deep penetration agents (DPAs) in the ASG. Khadaffy Janjalani recently admitted such infiltration, though he contends that most DPAs have been eliminated, and the few remaining ones are marked.[15] What is surprising is not only the seeming ease of infiltration but its apparently non-fatal effect on the ASG. On the first point, the ASG may have been particularly vulnerable to infiltration because of the outlaw or bandit milieu from which it sprang and within which it continues to operate. In a world of gunrunners, pirates, and kidnappers, in which the military is the prime source of guns, infiltration is relatively easy.[16]

The most prominent DPA was Edwin Angeles (known variously as Ibrahim Yakub, Ibrahim Panduga, or Abu Qudamahack), a Christian convert to Islam, who became the right-hand man of Abdurajak Janjalani (Balana, 1994, p. 6).

Angeles was not present at the inception of the ASG but joined after the Janjalani brothers returned from Afghanistan in 1991, when he was able to befriend and 'sweet talk' Janjalani in Manila.[17] He was widely reported in the local and national media to have been connected with the police since 1985 and to have infiltrated the Communist urban guerrilla group Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB) and then helped form its rogue breakaway Red Scorpion Gang in Manila.[18] After being exposed there, he was sent to infiltrate the ASG in Mindanao (Torres, 1994). He became the ASG's conduit to the AFP and Philippine National Police (PNP) for arms procurement, and is said to have been behind the ASG's kidnapping strategy.[19]

Sahiron allegedly found Angeles's police intelligence identification documents during one of his sojourns to the ASG camp in Patikul, Sulu. Abdurajak Janjalani prevented Sahiron from killing him on the spot, saving the life of the man who is thought to have later tipped off the police about his whereabouts, leading to his killing on 18 December 1998.[20] About a month later, the ASG assassinated Angeles.

The ASG was not always successful in the game of agents, double agents, and calculated risks called *gamitan* (vernacular for 'using each other'). But, despite the killing of several top leaders such as Janjalani and Sabaya, the group has survived. Turner attributes the ASG's survival to its ability to adapt to its environment, including succeeding in influencing the activities of its main environmental adversary, the military, thus reducing uncertainty and threats from this source (Turner, 2003, p. 399). The ASG's survival was helped by collusion at certain times and to a limited extent with its main adversary, including arms procurement.

## Bandits: social and criminal

The 'bandit' tag was firmly affixed to the ASG after the high-profile hostage crises of 2000 and 2001, but it reflects a much older tradition of bandits and outlaws in the areas in which the ASG is strongest. According to American anthropologist Charles Frake, referring to the ASG's significant Yakan ethnic composition, especially in Basilan:

> *The mention of outlaws in connection with the Abu Sayyaf points to another identity, an alternative to all the rest which has long been available as sometimes convenient to embrace and sometimes useful to attribute to others. I encountered this identity early on, in the 1960s, when collecting life histories among Yakan elders. Quite commonly, the narrator would describe a period of his or her life as being 'when we [usually a whole kin group was involved] were mundu,' that is, when they, for a time, became 'outlaws.' Being a mundu frequently entails being a wanted sought by the authorities, a proudly proclaimed identity that provides one with sanctuary in the homes of non-hostile fellow Yakan. The outlaw identity has a long history in Muslim Philippines . . . Among Philippine Muslims, the careers of famous outlaws of history are enshrined, like that of Jesse James, in story and song . . .*
>
> *. . . Yakan life histories show that being an outlaw can be a self-proclaimed identity (after all, the law one is 'out of' is not one's own), but it is equally an identity ascribed by others as a way of attributing base motives to acts of violence. If outlaws did not exist, they would have to be invented to account for what one sees, or would like others to see, as totally unjustified violence.* (Frake, 1998)

Frake had described the ASG as 'like outlaws, but outlaws with an agenda and an ideology' (Frake, 1998). The ASG might be described as 'quasi-bandit' and 'quasi-rebel'.

The Tausugs, another significant ethnic component of the ASG, have a tradition of seafaring slave-raiding in the Sulu sultanate in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, including some seizures of Catholic missionaries for ransom. 'The Abu Sayyaf raiders of today seem to pulsate with the same centuries-old "meme" (introduced by Richard Dawkins as the cultural equivalent of the biological gene) that once animated their slave-raiding ancestors' (David, 2000, p. 7; Vitug, 2001, p. 22). Contemporary expressions of this 'meme' might include not only the ASG's earlier kidnapping for ransom activities but also its more recent acts of maritime piracy and terrorism (Banlaoi, 2005; 2006).

In more recent times, when Moros refer to the Manila government as a 'government of foreign people' (referring to mainstream Filipinos), the ASG has been able to tap into the long-standing Moro rejection of state authority, whether Spanish, American, or Filipino. Against this backdrop, the ASG is not necessarily seen as 'extremist bandits' in the communities in which it operates but has enjoyed some mass support in some parts of Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi as a result of kidnapping operations (Turner, 2003, p. 392; Gutoc, 2003). A former ASG urban hit squad leader in Basilan from 1992–98 spoke of a time when:

> *[p]eople were supportive of us because when we got ransom money from the kidnappings, we gave them money. When they asked for pump boats [motorized outriggers], we gave them . . . for their livelihood . . . They would hide our firearms. That is why the military could not catch us or follow us.* (Longid, 1994)

The image of benign Robin Hood-style banditry does not sit well with the later, more lucrative, kidnappings, including of foreigners. But even when pursuing predatory or criminal banditry, the ASG has succeeded in distinguishing itself from other kidnap-for-ransom gangs, such as the Pentagon Gang in Central Mindanao. *Philippine Daily Inquirer* columnist and sociology professor Randy David called them 'postmodern bandits', with all the literal and figurative connotations the label implies:

> *Nothing is more striking than the figure of the Abu Sayyaf bandit who wears a ski mask under Ralph Lauren shades, brandishes an automatic weapon and communicates ransom demands by a satellite mobile phone. He speaks a mix of Islam, ethno-nationalism and anti-modern shibboleths. He talks to media with the smoothness of a politician, negotiates with diplomats and public officials, but takes a third wife by abduction. He accepts ransom in foreign currency, to be paid in cash or by digital transfer to a numbered bank account. He talks of settling down in an orange plantation in his backyard, while his comrades plan future raids on foreigners holidaying in island luxury resorts.* (David, 2000)

Other scholars, particularly Eduardo F. Ugarte, question David's catchy characterization of the ASG as 'postmodern', pointing to evidence of continuity with past traditions.[21]

Sabaya and Ghalib Andang (known as Commander Robot) have been largely responsible for the ASG's bandit imprint, thanks to their prominent roles in the most sensational kidnappings. By 2001, they seemed to have tipped the balance in favour of the view of the ASG as bandits and 'entrepreneurs of violence' who use their reputation and capacity for violence as capital to gain relative security, power, and control in a highly unstable area as well as the money, resources, and respect needed for self-perpetuation (Gutierrez, 2000, pp. 351–62). The view of the ASG as bandits rather than rebels is backed up by accounts of victims of the three major hostage crises of 2000–02, all of whom have published at least one book about their experience (Torres, 2001; Aventajado, 2004; Burnham, 2003).[22]

In the cases of the Sipadan and Dos Palmas hostage takings, for example, it soon became clear that money was the object, gained not only through the main ransom demands but through brazen financial charges to foreign journalists for access to guides and interviews with ASG leaders and hostages (Ressa, 2003, pp. 114–15). In the midst of such profiteering, political demands and Islamic talk rang hollow. A Catholic priest who was taken hostage in the earlier Basilan incident tried to understand his ASG captors:

ASG Basilan leader, Isnilon Hapilon (second from the right), and his ASG team pose for the camera under their tent in the highlands of Patikul, Sulu. This photo was found recorded on a mobile phone recovered from the slain ASG leader Abu Solaiman in January 2008. © Courtesy of Philippine intelligence sources

> *[t]hey were really fundamentalists, he thought. They were serious about their faith and always prayed and talked about defending Islam. Later, however, he realized they were out only to make money. They only used Islam as a front. It was easy for them to recruit followers because they offered huge sums to entice people to join them.* (Torres, 2001, p. 68)

In the Dos Palmas hostage crisis, Khadaffy Janjalani, Abu Sabaya, Isnilon Totoni Hapilon (alias Abu Musab), and two ASG sub-leaders took five of the women hostages as 'wives' while these were in their custody (Burnham and Merrill, 2003). Sabaya had done the same with a teacher held hostage in the earlier Basilan incident, with the knowledge and toleration of Khadaffy (Torres, 2001).

The ASG's bandit nature could be attributed to its infiltration by characters such as Robot and Nandi Uddih, both former MNLF members who had served as henchmen of local politician warlords in Sulu. They eventually escaped justice and found their way to the ASG. Many other ASG bandits are similarly transient hangers-on, referred to in the vernacular as *nanampig-sampig* (literally 'to side-slip' or drift along as events dictate).[23] Robot, Nandi Uddih, and other ASG bandits were able to persuade the ASG's leaders to scale up kidnappings and ransom demands. ASG Sulu leader Sahiron says he and Dr. Abu never gave any orders to kidnap, though they became accessories to the Sipadan hostage taking when they accommodated transit through Sahiron's hilltop camp in Patikul .[24] Both appeared during the initial hostage negotiations with Philippine government chief negotiator Roberto N. Aventajado, but it became clear to him that it was Robot and Susukan who called the shots for the ASG in these negotiations by virtue of their custody of the hostages in their Talipao camp (Aventajado, 2004, p. 71).

The generally held belief in Sulu is that the large-scale kidnappings, such as those at Sipadan and Dos Palmas, were the work of kidnap-for-ransom syndicates based in the island municipalities of Sulu who then turned the hostages over to the ASG. Local sources (who cannot be named for security reasons) say the ASG in Sulu simply does not have the logistics required or the necessary coastline locations for such large-scale seaborne operations. The academic Ugarte suggests that such groups could not possibly participate in major criminal activities without the financial sponsorship and protection of local politicians, businessmen, the police, and the military, who, in turn, frequently use the 'ASG' as convenient scapegoats for their own crimes, thereby unwittingly reinforcing the real ASG's fearsome reputation. Ugarte sees these interconnections as particularly manifested in the phenomenon of kidnapping in the southern Philippines.[25]

The ASG has justified kidnapping on a number of occasions, even though it is a criminal act and is denounced by the MNLF and the MILF as 'un-Islamic'. An ASG spokesman in Basilan called kidnapping 'part of the revolution', a form of struggle in jihad (Quimpo, 1999). In the words of Khadaffy Janjalani, 'Philosophically, if it is allowed to kill the enemy, why not allow to just kidnap him? Religiously, no less than the Prophet of Islam gave the order to kidnap or seize the caravan of Abu Suffian? So, what is the difference of kidnapping or seizure then and now?'[26] An ASG manifesto distributed during the Sipadan hostage crisis justified it in historical terms: '[for a]bout 100 years already, the Bangsamoro people have been made *hostages* under the rule of democracy . . . The colonial government in Manila *kidnapped* the sovereignty of the Bangsamoro people. This is the real fact and barbaric act against humanity' (Agence France Presse, 2000; emphasis added). An ASG sympathizer in Basilan provided another justification for the kidnappings, which is the impact on the media: '. . . if there's no other way, if that is their last chance to be heard. It's hard to get attention, especially for people like us in the neglected parts of our country' (Labog-Javellana, 2000).

Counter-terrorism experts have noted that, post-Sabaya and post-Robot, 'almost all kidnapping incidents by the ASG have ceased', and they have offered analysis on 'why is it giving up its lucrative kidnap-for-ransom business (and getting back into the terrorism business)' (Abuza, 2005, p. 11). This brings us into the latest iteration of the ASG persona.

## Terrorists: home-grown and international

According to Zachary Abuza, the ASG's shift from bandit-type kidnapping to the classic terrorism of bombings in 2004 was due in part to changes within the ASG and its leadership, particularly the pre-eminence of Khadaffy Janjalani after the killing of Sabaya in 2002 and the capture and subsequent killing of

Robot in 2005. Also influential (and discussed in the profiles of the MILF and JI in Part Two of this volume) were the distancing of the MILF from the ASG, which, in turn, seeks to attract hardliners from the MILF, and Jemaah Islamiyah's reaching out to the ASG as a more reliable partner in jihad than the MILF (Abuza, 2005, pp. 12–27).

Following the death of his elder brother, ASG founding amir Abdurajak, and with another elder brother, Hector, in jail, the quiet and seemingly timid Khadaffy Janjalani was thrust into the position of amir of the ASG. He was finally able to consolidate his amirship with the exit of his domineering sidekick Sabaya[27] but was seen by a number of analysts as lacking the capability, leadership qualities, and sophistication to provide direction to the group.[28] Khadaffy and his key lieutenant, Abu Solaiman, oversaw a shift away from kidnapping before they were killed in battle in late 2006 and early 2007, respectively.

When interviewed, Khadaffy was reluctant to divulge what he called the 'military secrets' behind the doctrinal or tactical shift away from kidnapping.[29] Our hypothesis is that major kidnapping operations, particularly those involving foreign hostages, have proven too drawn out, labour-intensive, and risky, especially after the involvement of US counter-terrorism forces and resources. Another reason might be that funding for the ASG is coming from another source, namely, international terrorist networks. As for the media impact of major kidnappings, this can be achieved just as well by major bombings.

Bombings of civilian, especially Christian, targets are not new to the ASG, which carried out such attacks in its early years. What appear new are their scale and level of coordination, and the decision to pinpoint metro Manila as a target area, exemplified by the three-cities Valentine's Day bombings of February 2005. Also new are maritime attacks, such as the Superferry 14 bombing of February 2004. ASG spokesman Jainal Antel Sali, Jr. (alias Abu Solaiman) has said: '[w]e will bring the war that you impose on us to your lands and seas, homes and streets. We will multiply the pain and suffering that you have inflicted on our people' (Garrido, 2004). He was, of course, referring to the war in Muslim Mindanao. But the message and, more importantly, the actual bombings show a clear terrorist bent.

Notwithstanding the lack of an official international legal definition of terrorism (see Chapter 4), the ASG shows undeniable terrorist traits: deliberate targeting of civilians or non-combatants, and spreading terror or extreme fear among the civilian population related to some political objective. From the early 1990s to the present, the ASG has not just undertaken a few isolated terrorist acts but has followed a *clear and consistent pattern, plan or policy of terrorist acts or methods, making it a terrorist organization* (Santos, 2002, p. 29).

Asked categorically whether the ASG is a terrorist organization, Khadaffy Janjalani replies:

> *Not what they mean. We are mujahideen too, but a bit brutal since we don't distinguish oppressive soldiers from its public or citizenry—they are generally our enemies. And we cannot soften up or become friends even to Arabs if they are in league with our enemies.*[30]

The latter is a reference to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which Janjalani accuses of interfering with the Moro struggle for self-determination by urging the MNLF to scale down its key demand from independence to autonomy.[31]

The ASG's brand of terrorism is basically home-grown, as is its jihad in Mindanao, though it has become internationalized through targeting of foreign nationals, cross-border raids, the glare of the international media, and foreign diplomatic and military intervention. It is not imported from al-Qaeda (the ASG would have had no need to raise substantial funds through the risky practice of kidnapping had al-Qaeda been funding it at the time) or Jemaah Islamiyah, although its links with the latter are not denied. According to Abu Solaiman:

> *[t]he irony about the Philippine government is that . . . they are belittling us but they are exaggerating the problem of terrorism in the country and using, as an example, the likes of Jemaah Islamiyah, which is based in Indonesia. But what is in front of them they do not see.* (Garrido, 2004)

Khadaffy Janjalani describes the ASG link to Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law Mohammed Jamal Khalifa's group as dictated by mutual necessity and convenience. Khalifa's group needed volunteers for Afghanistan, while the ASG needed money to buy arms, ammunition, and other necessities to fight the Philippine government. Khadaffy Janjalani claims the ASG received PHP 6 million (USD 130,000) in financial assistance and an exposure visit to Afghanistan. He denies any ASG link to JI by claiming not to know any JI leader, though he acknowledges that some JI operatives accompany the ASG in the field: '[w]e actually don't mind who they are, provided they are willing to lend us a helping hand and follow our way of doing things here, we are not that choosy.'[32] Sahiron is more reticent about ASG links to al-Qaeda and JI: 'I have no knowledge and even if there is any, it is useless if we are here and they are at the other side of the globe [and could take us] for a ride like the case of the OIC.'[33] He, like Khadaffy Janjalani, admits that foreign nationals sometimes accompany them in the field: '[w]hy should we refuse them, it's no big deal and redounds to our best interest?'[34]

The picture that emerges is not so much of a formal alliance between the ASG and al-Qaeda or JI but of a tactical alliance of convenience, pragmatic rather than ideological. While counter-terrorism literature often speaks of al-Qaeda or JI 'co-opting' the ASG and the MILF, the ASG could also have been using al-Qaeda, if only to project strength. Wadi notes that '[t]he countries have the OIC, so they ally among themselves. On the level of Islamic fronts and movements, they have this network of Islamic movements. And this is where the Abu Sayyaf may be linked' (cited in Gutoc, 2003, p. 25). But he cautions against overstating this link. In the post-11 September environment, both the US and the Philippines governments are fixated with the ASG's terrorism and international terrorist linkages, erasing the truth of a social basis for this group.[35]

The linking of the ASG to international terrorism and its treatment as a target in the global war on terror has created problems for the application of international humanitarian law to the armed conflict with the ASG. On the one hand, it is still called a bandit group, in particular by the Philippine government, and banditry and terrorist activities are outside the scope of armed conflict and international humanitarian law.[36] On the other hand, a global war on terror connotes an international armed conflict. Significant US armed forces have joined AFP brigades for military, not police, operations against the ASG. It is not clear, then, whether international humanitarian law should apply to this armed conflict, and whether captured ASG members should be treated as common criminals, lawful combatants, prisoners of war, or 'unlawful' combatants.

Post-Khadaffy, overall leadership of the ASG, at least in terms of moral guidance if not necessarily operational command, appears to have fallen to Sahiron, the long-time ASG leader in Sulu.[37] Sahiron is much older (he is in his seventies) than Khadaffy, and his legitimacy as leader, according to many local sources in Sulu, derives from Abdurajak's instruction to his wife upon his death to offer herself in marriage (*tahakkim*) to Sahiron as someone who could realize Abdurajak's vision.

## Conclusion

Where are we now in pinning down the nature of Al-Harakatul Islamiyya, i.e. Abu Sayyaf Group? It is tempting to adopt a 3-in-1 instant coffee-type formula by coining a 'rebel–bandit–terrorist' label. But the group seems to add up to more than the sum of its three elements, and the mix of those elements has not been fixed but has shifted over the years. At different stages in the ASG's history, certain elements have been more pronounced; hence the notion that the group is morphing or shape-shifting (Arguillas, 1994). This mixing of metaphors—of coffee and chameleons—is symptomatic of the problem: how to understand, let alone resolve, the ASG conundrum, a group that does seem to be 'one of a kind' (Hofilena, 2001).

Maybe the answer lies in being 'postmodern' ourselves, in the sense of eschewing linear and structural analysis of these so-called 'postmodern bandits'. To understand the ASG, the group needs to be seen as a set of interrelated and dynamic elements, which form changing patterns that need to be analysed. From the above discussion, we can reasonably describe the ASG as *a Moro Islamic jihadist rebel group, composed mainly of young Tausugs, Yakans, and Sama in Western Mindanao, with some bandit elements, which resorts to extreme means, including terrorism, to achieve an independent Islamic state in the whole of Mindanao.* The group is not just reloading its guns; it has also been reloading its identity. Some analysts say this includes a return to its roots—Abu Sayyaf redux, if you will (Elegant, 2004). It is important to note that, in the final analysis, solving the ASG problem depends on solving the MNLF and MILF root problems.

## Epilogue (September 2008)

In June 2008, one of the co-authors of this case study, Octavio A. Dinampo, was kidnapped by the ASG, along with television anchorwoman Ces Oreña-Drilon, whom he was guiding to an interview with ASG amir Radullan Sahiron. ASG elements under Sahiron's command held the hostages for ten days in the hinterlands of Sulu. They were released after a PHP 20 million (USD 440,000) ransom was paid for Drilon. As of November 2008, this was the most sensational ASG news story of the year and demonstrated that, while the group is not exactly 'out of business', it may well be in some desperate financial need.

Dinampo, a long-standing resident, academic, and civic leader in Sulu, had interviewed Sahiron in March 2006 for this publication, and met him again in February 2008. It was at this second meeting that Dinampo first told Sahiron of Drilon's request for an interview and explored the possibility of a peace process between the ASG and the government—Dinampo had been considering whether it might be time for a more conciliatory approach towards the ASG, since the hardline military approach was not working as a lasting solution. Sahiron finally signalled the go-ahead for the interview in early June 2008, but he had something else in mind—the opportunity to raise ransom money for the ASG. As a result of this betrayal, Dinampo has revised some of his earlier views on Sahiron, many of which had influenced this case study. He now questions Sahiron's claim that he never gave orders to kidnap. In question, too, is his previous assessment of Sahiron as a freedom fighter and the sincerity of his expressed interest in a possible peace process between the ASG and the government.

Many other observers of the ASG also revised their assessments of the group in the wake of the kidnapping. An editorial in the leading Philippines daily newspaper provides a pithy description of the complexities involved in assessing the group:

> *The essential truth is, the kidnapping of Drilon and company, which includes professor and peace advocate Octavio Dinampo, is part of the complicated history of Mindanao—and thus of the Philippines as a whole. That a barbaric bandit group like the Abu Sayyaf emerged out of the almost-medieval poverty of Basilan and Sulu, waving the colors of Islamic fundamentalism, wrapped in the mantle*

> *of Moro nationalism (and protected, in its early years, by the veil of collusion with military elements)—this is a 'story' that goes beyond the mere storytellers.* (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2008)

It is interesting to note that Sahiron and other ASG or JI personalities are labelled in the Anti-Terrorism Task Force 'wanted' posters and leaflets as 'murderer' and 'terrorist' in English but *mamumunuh* (murderer) and *munduh* (bandit, not terrorist) in Tausug. Indeed, because kidnapping connotes banditry, it is the *bandit* aspect of the ASG that currently overshadows its other aspects in the public mind. But this could change with the next sensational bombing or ambush of soldiers; then, it will be the *terrorist* aspect or the *rebel* aspect of the ASG that will come to the fore in the public imagination. To paraphrase what has been said about the Mindanao conflict, these are all pieces of an enormously complex jigsaw, and to pick any one of them as the outstanding aspect would obscure an understanding of the total picture. ■

## Endnotes

1 Radullan Sahiron, top ASG commander in Sulu, interviewed by Dinampo on 18 March 2006 in Indanan, Sulu (hereinafter 'Sahiron interview').

2 This account is confirmed by the ASG's former *amir* (leader) Khadaffy A. Janjalani in an interview by Dinampo on 27 February 2006 in Basilan (hereinafter 'Janjalani interview').

3 Personal communication with Santos, 27 March 2008.

4 Janjalani interview.

5 A recent essay by Filipino academic Eduardo F. Ugarte, finds that the nature and structure of the ASG is basically a medial alliance of minimal alliances of the kind customarily found in rural Sulu and Basilan, which are facilitated by the weakness of the Philippine state in these regions (Ugarte, 2008). These are not organizations in the conventional sense since they are not distinctly bounded. Rather, minimal alliances in the Tausug context usually emerge within a specific community, are formed between kith and kin, and have certain underlying rules and dynamics. These groups are situation-centered—formed for protection, security, and military-type purposes—which accounts for much fluidity in size. They are also leader-centred: leaders form the central core of each group, and groups are defined in terms of their leaders. Medial alliances are established when the leaders of several minimal alliances join forces in relation to a dispute.

6 Tuan Awliya, ASG Secretary-General, informal interview by Dinampo on 17 July 1991 in Jolo, Sulu. Wahab Akbar was one of five people killed in a bombing on 13 November 2007 at the Batasang Pambansa complex of the House of Representatives, which police publicly suspected was directed at him.

7 Sahiron interview.

8 Janjalani interview.

9 Comment by Dinampo, based on conversations and observations in Sulu, where he is resident.

10 The term ASG was popularized by Philippine marine soldiers under General Guillermo Ruiz years after the group was first formed, when government deep-penetration agents had infiltrated the group, and it had carried out a number of beheadings of enemies.

11 Observation by Julkipli M. Wadi, a local Islamic studies scholar who has studied Janjalani's *khutbas* (sermons).

12 According to Prof. Rommel C. Banlaoi of the National Defense College of the Philippines (NDCP), the AFP still uses 'MCFF' to describe the evolution of the ASG.

13 Janjalani interview.

14 Ajibon and Malik interviews.

15 Janjalani interview.

16 This point was made by Nathan Gilbert Quimpo in an email debate with Eric Gutierrez on the nature of the ASG, 6 September 2000. Both are Filipino political activists who have published on the issue.

17 Janjalani interview.

18 These are denied by an authoritative source from the former ABB.

19 Abraham S. Iribani, then head of the MNLF peace talks secretariat, interview by Soliman M. Santos, Jr. on 11 June 1994 in Manila. Janjalani confirmed that, as a member of the ASG, Angeles helped secure arms and ammunition for the group from the PNP regional camp in Zamboanga City (Janjalani interview).

20 The view that Angeles might have tipped off the police about Janjalani is commonly held in Basilan. See, for example, Gloria and Vitug (2000, p. 205).

21 Personal communication Santos in 2006–07 by Eduardo F. Ugarte, postdoctoral Research Fellow in Terrorism Studies, University of Canberra.

22 The main crises were the hostage taking of 53 teachers and students in Tumahubong and Sinangkapan barangays (villages) in Sumisip, Basilan from March to May 2000; the Sipadan hostage crisis played out mainly in Jolo island in April–September 2000; and the Dos Palmas hostage crisis that occurred in Basilan and the Zamboanga peninsula in May 2001–June 2002.

23 Sahiron interview.

24 Sahiron interview.

25 Email communication with Santos by Eduardo F. Ugarte, July–September 2008.

26 Janjalani interview.

27 These opposite personality styles and Janjalani's acquiescence to Sabaya can be gleaned from the accounts of Torres (2001) and Burnham (2003).

28 Comment to the author by Julkipli M. Wadi, 20 February 2006.

29 Janjalani interview.

30 Janjalani interview.

31 Janjalani interview.

32 Janjalani interview.

33 Sahiron interview.

34 Sahiron interview.

35 Comment on an early draft of this chapter by Professor Wadi.

36 *Prosecutor vs. Dusko Tadic*, ICTY Case No. IT-94-I-T, 7 May 1997, Judgment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

37 Comment by Octavio A. Dinampo, 8 March 2007.

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CHAPTER 6

# DDR and ‘Disposition of Forces’ of Philippine Rebel Groups (Overview)

Soliman M. Santos, Jr.

## Introduction

While no complete or comprehensive disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of an armed group has taken place in the Philippines, ‘a variety of interventions incorporating elements of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration have been pursued’ (Muggah, 2004, p. 23). The main relevant experience has been the integration of members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) into the police and army following the 1996 peace agreement, which is analysed in depth in the case study that follows this overview (see Chapter 7).

But there were two important prior DDR—or more precisely integration and reintegration—experiences, which we survey in this overview. These involve the indigenous Cordillera People’s Liberation Army (CPLA) in the wake of the 1986 peace agreement it signed with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP), and two groups of military rebels who signed a peace agreement with the GRP in 1995.

The continued relevance of the first experience is the negative signal it sends to other rebel groups who face the prospect of peace talks. In-fighting and frustration with what the CPLA perceives as the government’s failure to deliver on promises made during a 20-year peace process has debilitated the CPLA and left it haggling with the government over slots in integration and livelihood projects. The concluding section of this chapter views some of the lessons learned from this and other early DDR experiences from the perspective of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), now the major Moro rebel group currently engaged in peace negotiations. We note a change in the language used by the government in an effort to allay rebel concerns that DDR is aimed at depoliticizing and weakening the group.

The example of the military rebels provides a context for exploring what happens when the subjects of DDR efforts already form part of the security sector. The complexities involved in tackling the situation were laid bare when a later generation of military rebels in 2003–07 was found to include some of the original group, a few of whom had been amnestied and reinstated as part of the 1995 peace agreement (see 'Recurrent military adventurism and the reform agenda', below).

Finally, we survey various firearms retrieval programs, notably under the National Reconciliation and Development Program (now the National Program for Unification and Development), which are related to these and other peace processes. The various livelihood and development programs for rebel groups in peace processes are mentioned, though the main focus of this overview is the disposition of forces and weapons.

Drawing on the various DDR experiences in the Philippines, the central thesis of this chapter is that DDR efforts carry risks when conducted as a quasi-counter-insurgency tactic aimed at weakening rebel groups rather than building a lasting peace. Key findings include:

Guns and ammunition meant for the military end up in the hands of MNLF fighters and other armed groups.
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- While the terminology of DDR can be an obstacle to its take-up by rebel groups, it is the concept, design, and implementation of DDR—including its integration with the broader peace process—which really matters.
- The momentum surrounding peace talks must not be lost after an initial ceasefire or retrieval of weapons.
- The government's track record on DDR has been poor, with a tendency to slow down after an initial ceasefire or retrieval of weapons.
- There is a tendency among rebel groups to lose their lustre or even unravel after achieving initial concessions or confidence-building measures. The CPLA is an example of a group that seemed to quickly set aside its core aspirations after achieving an initial peace agreement, a ceasefire, and a few concessions.
- DDR is not a simple set of administrative, managerial, or logistical measures of a short-term or tactical nature, but a program that should be approached with the long-term goal of reconstruction, in all its aspects.

## Standard definitions, Philippine angles

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs are commonly implemented for the post-conflict disposition of the forces and weapons of non-state armed groups—particularly rebel or insurgent groups, though they can include excess state forces, especially post-conflict—usually as a result of a final peace agreement embodying a negotiated political settlement. These terms may seem self-explanatory, especially to those familiar with the post-conflict field. But interpretations can vary, particularly from the rebel perspective.

The literature on the subject treats DDR as a cluster of activities conventionally associated both with internal peace processes and with international peacekeeping operations. *Disarmament* refers to the collection and disposal of small arms and light and heavy weapons, both from combatants and civilians, within a conflict or post-conflict zone.[1] Disarmament should also include stockpile management.[2] *Demobilization* refers to the process by which armed groups disband their military structures and their combatants begin a transformation into civilian life. They are sometimes recruited or integrated into existing or new unified state military or police forces. *Reintegration* refers to the

Thousands of confiscated or surrendered weapons line the storage rooms of the Philippine National Police's Firearms and Explosive Division's (FED) warehouse at Camp Crame in Manila, January 2007. © Lucian Read/Small Arms Survey

adaptation of ex-combatants and sometimes their families or dependants to productive civilian life (Muggah, 2004, pp. 14–15).

DDR is 'not (or at least should not be conceived as) a substitute for political solutions'. Rather, it is essentially a post-conflict confidence-building measure; a security component that allows the development component of the peace agreement to proceed on the ground. 'Though DDR can contribute to development, it is not a development intervention. Nor is social and economic development a sufficient substitute for DDR' (Muggah, 2004, p. 14).

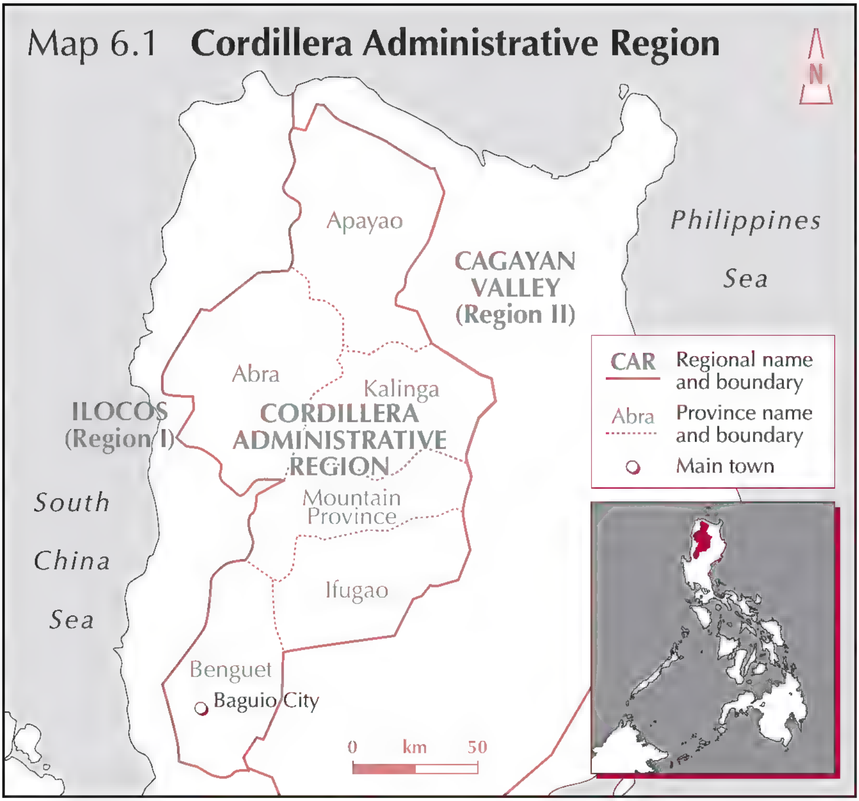
In the final analysis, it is difficult to come up with a standard definition, sequence, or universally applicable model of DDR. Moreover, the terminology becomes even more nuanced when referring to DDR of child soldiers. According to a UNICEF representative, 'disarming' should be differentiated from 'disarmament', since the former is often carried out by force, while the latter is usually done in the context of a negotiated peace settlement with an armed group (Fajardo, 2003). 'Disarmament' and 'demobilization' need not be sequential and, crucially, disarmament should not be a prerequisite for demobilization when forces, particularly children associated with fighting forces, bear no weapons (Fajardo, 2003, p. 82). The Philippine Coalition to Protect Children Involved in Armed Conflict has recently dropped the first D or 'disarmament' and added 'rehabilitation', resulting in a 'DRR' framework (PHRIC, 2005, pp. 85–93). 'Reintegration' and 'rehabilitation' are often used interchangeably where reintegration is associated with reunification with family and community, while rehabilitation is associated with recovery and healing. This chapter does not review the experience of specific DDR programs for child soldiers, on which there is already significant literature (Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers, 2003: PHRIC, 2005, pp. 85–93).

The above clarification of terms notwithstanding, DDR is not popular from the perspective of rebel or insurgent groups, even within the framework of negotiated peace settlements. 'Disarmament' holds connotations of surrender, as in surrendering one's arms. 'Demobilization' is also anathema to rebels whose main revolutionary task is mobilization of their support base. Furthermore, in the Philippines the term is associated with a drive for pacification wherein the government would concede just enough in negotiations to achieve the cessation of hostilities or demobilization of rebel combatants, without really addressing the substantive issues raised by the conflict. Instead, a number of Philippine peace agreements (see below and Chapter 7) refer to 'disposition of forces (and weapons)', which roughly corresponds to 'demobilization' and 'disarmament' but is considered more palatable by armed rebel groups.

Moreover, for separatist Moro rebels in the Philippines, 'reintegration' sounds too close to the hated 'national integration' policy which is viewed as seeking to subsume the struggling Moro identity under the dominant Filipino identity. Indeed, as Chapter 7 on the MNLF shows, none of the terms 'disarmament', 'demobilization', or 'reintegration' is mentioned in the two peace agreements signed with the group. Indeed the term DDR has hardly been used in peace processes with any Philippine armed group.

## DDR and the Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA)

The CPLA is an indigenous faction that broke away from the Communist New People's Army (NPA) in the Cordillera region during the early months of President Corazon Aquino's administration, in 1986. Its core demand was


Map 6.1 Cordillera Administrative Region
N
Apayao
CAGAYAN VALLEY (Region II)
Philippines Sea
Abra
Kalinga
ILOCOS (Region I)
CORDILLERA ADMINISTRATIVE REGION
Mountain Province
South China Sea
Ifugao
Benguet
Baguio City
0 km 50
CAR Regional name and boundary
Abra Province name and boundary
Main town

the setting up of a Cordillera autonomous region founded on the indigenous institution of the *bodong* (peace pacts among tribes resulting in alliances and commonwealths of tribes) and on the indigenous 'socialist way of life'. A second important demand was that the CPLA be maintained as the security force of this autonomous region 'which shall have just relations with the New Armed Forces of the Philippines' (Garcia and Hernandez, 1989, pp. 207–13).[3] Peace talks were initiated in the same year of the CPLA's formation, led by former priest turned NPA commander turned CPLA leader Conrado Balweg for the CPLA, and Aquino and senior cabinet members for the government. The talks resulted in the Mount Data ceasefire agreement. During the talks, it became clear that the 1987 Constitution prevented the government from immediately granting the CPLA its desired Cordillera autonomous region. Instead, autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao and in the Cordilleras were to be created via separate Organic Acts passed by Congress and subjected to local plebiscites. Pending this, the parties agreed to create an interim Cordillera *Administrative* Region via Executive Order 220, which stipulated that 'a regional security force shall be organized to assist in the defense and security of the region . . . [which] shall be the responsibility of the National Government.'[4]

Neither the Cordillera Autonomous Region nor the regional security force drawing from the CPLA was realized, however. Plebiscites on the former were held in 1989 and 1995 but were rejected by the Cordillera electorate. In 1999 the leaders of the main CPLA faction, Mailed Molina—who eventually became chair after Balweg was assassinated by the NPA—and James Sawatang, sent a native dagger to the presidential palace to symbolize the CPLA's growing impatience. President Joseph Estrada responded by creating a Special Committee to implement the integration of the CPLA into the AFP and PNP as part of a Cordillera regional security force. The CPLA pushed for its members to make up the regional security force in the Cordilleras, but the government refused. The Molina group acceded to the government offer of integration, and on 11 August 1999 signed a Memorandum of Undertaking on immediate integration of qualified members of the CPLA into the AFP.[5] By this time, the government already had some three years' experience with MNLF integration into the AFP and PNP (Chapter 7).

Following Estrada's ouster, it fell to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to implement the agreement. In August 2001 she issued Administrative Order 18 (AO18) covering 1,200 CPLA members under three components:

1. *Integration component:* an initial 264 CPLA members were to be integrated into the AFP, 15 as officers and 249 as enlisted personnel.
2. *Citizens Armed Force Geographical Units* (*CAFGU*) *component:* a total of six CAFGU Auxiliary Companies, comprising 528 CPLA members, were organized and are currently deployed throughout the six provinces of the Cordilleras.
3. *Livelihood component:* a further 408 CPLA members would benefit from livelihood projects provided by government.

The third component was not implemented because of budget deficits. Nevertheless, Arroyo issued a verbal directive to accommodate an additional

3,800 CPLA members in an *expanded reintegration program* for all three components, bringing total coverage up to 5,000 CPLA members. This compares with an estimated group size of 4,000 members in 2007, according to government sources (PIA, 2007). Subsequent intermittent negotiations spanning several years centred on the number of people that could be accommodated; the general pattern was that the CPLA requested additional slots and the AFP appealed to its lack of operational funds before offering fewer places.

Under AO18, CPLA forces who were integrated into the AFP or CAFGU and *voluntarily* turned over their firearms would be compensated under the AFP Balik-Baril buy-back program (see 'Firearms retrieval programs', below). These firearms would 'be accounted for as government property and may be re-issued to the applicant during training/deployment as members of separate [AFP] units or CAFGU Active Auxiliary Companies' (OPAPP, 2005). This provision says nothing about CPLA elements who do not integrate with the AFP and the CAFGU. Given the gaps in the DDR process covering the CPLA, it is no wonder that only 160 firearms were turned in by the CPLA during a nearly 18-year period from March 1987 to December 2004 (OPAPP, 2005).

## CPLA factions and rumblings

CPLA integration initially benefited the unified CPLA, led by Molina and Sawatang. But at least three other CPLA factions (see CPLA profile in Part Two) were unhappy with the handling of the agreement, in particular because it settled on total integration of the CPLA into the existing security forces (Albano, 2004).

The integration of CPLA forces into the AFP and CAFGU not only caused internal conflict but definitively put the CPLA in opposition to the Communist Cordillera People's Democratic Front (CPDF) of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and the New People's Army (NPA), which dispute the CPLA's vision of an autonomous region based on bodong. Armed clashes between the groups have been occurring since they split in 1986.

As the initial peace agreement with the CPLA neared its 20th anniversary in 2006, the government admitted its failure to fulfil its promises to the group and set out to review the agreement. The new Presidential Adviser to the Peace

Process, Secretary Jesus G. Dureza, called the CPLA 'the most patient' rebel group in the country for sustaining a ceasefire with the government despite the latter's lapses (Cabrera, 2006). On 25 April 2008 the two parties drafted and subsequently signed a Joint Declaration of Commitment 'toward the completion of the 1986 Mount Data Peace Accord'. Among the declaration's consensus points are:

- The CPLA shall submit 3,025 validated CPLA members to the AFP and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP). This number excludes the 1,200 CPLA members already integrated into the AFP and would bring the total to 4,225.
- The legal opinion of the Department of Justice will be sought on the correct interpretation of a provision for the establishment of the Cordillera Regional Security Force.
- AO18 on integration of fully qualified CPLA members into the AFP and CAFGU is declared to have been fully implemented.
- The GRP is to provide assistance to families of some 70 CPLA members killed in action during the joint CPLA–AFP campaign against the NPA.
- The OPAPP commits to facilitating the full implementation of the Mount Data Peace Accord by tapping existing mechanisms and programs such as the new Social Integration Program (SIP).

The accent on the SIP and the rejection of the CPLA's demand for the immediate revival of the Cordillera Regional Assembly and the Cordillera Executive Board is in keeping with the government's aim to sideline political autonomy in its dealings with the group and its new overarching policy of circumscribing all dealings with insurgents within the framework of DDR (see 'The MILF peace process,' below).

## DDR and the military rebels of 1986–89

What happens when the subjects of DDR efforts are already ensconced within the security sector? This was the problem posed by seven coup attempts from within the military in 1986–89 during the Aquino administration, and again more recently in July 2003, February 2006, and November 2007 during the current Arroyo presidency. This section focuses on the earlier rebellions, which were larger and had a far greater impact. In 1987 military rebels occupied the AFP headquarters for a day, and for a week in 1989 they held the country's main business and financial district. The more recent coup attempts, by comparison, were mostly resolved within a day and did not trigger peace negotiations; rebels were dealt with through the criminal and military justice systems.

The 1986 rebellions involved two groups of military officers. The main block was the Rebolusyonaryong Alyansang Makabansa (Revolutionary Nationalist Alliance) soldiers of the Filipino People-Young Officers' Union (RAM-SFP-YOU), with roots in the 'Reform the Armed Forces Movement', which helped oust dictator Ferdinand Marcos in February 1986. The smaller group was the pro-Marcos Alyansang Tapat sa Sambayanan (ALTAS, Alliance Loyal to the People). Both groups opposed Aquino but cannot be characterized as non-state armed groups since they came from within the state armed forces

The strong anti-Aquino character of these military rebels may be a reason why she did not initiate peace negotiations with them. It was not until former military leader Fidel Ramos took office that peace talks got under way and were completed within the first half of his term, in 1992–95. The key features of the final peace agreements with ALTAS on 29 May 1995 and RAM-SFP-YOU on 13 October 1995 were (GRP, 1995a; 1995b):

1. Cessation of hostilities
2. Retrieval/disposition of weapons, equipment, and other materiel
3. Amnesty
4. Disposition of military, police, and civilian government personnel
5. Livelihood, material, and technical assistance
6. Continuation of talks on national reforms

The GRP negotiating panel considers the peace agreements with the RAM-SFP-YOU and ALTAS to have been substantially fulfilled (Government Peace Panel, 1998). The cessation of hostilities has for the most part been respected, although the more recent coup attempts by a new generation of military rebels indicate that the root causes of the rebellion have yet to be adequately addressed.

In terms of the amnesty—which, especially if part of a peace settlement, can be considered a 'reintegration' measure—368 ALTAS and 4,958 RAM-AFP-

YOU members and supporters were covered (Government Peace Panel, 1998).[6] Amnesties also paved the way for the disposition of military, police, and civilian government personnel affiliated with RAM-SFP-YOU and ALTAS. This took various forms such as re-entry or reinstatement (for the AFP), re-entry or absorption (for the PNP), retirement or separation (which affected a total of 19 former military rebels), promotion (of 41 officers with five under process), and restoration to full duty and pay status. More than 2,000 officers and enlisted personnel had been reinstated as of June 1998 into the AFP (54 officers; 1,394 EPs; and 51 under process), Navy (15 officers; 377 EPs; 138 under process), Air Force (22 officers; 22 EPs; four under process), and police (one officer and one EP) (Government Peace Panel, 1998).

The weapons handed in by the military rebels, listed in Table 6.1, are not reflective of the arsenals they held during the August 1987 and December 1989 coup attempts, when they used Tora-Tora fighter-bomber planes, Sikor-

Table 6.1

**Weapons handed in by military rebels, mainly from the RAM-SFP-YOU, 1995–96**

| Type of weapon | Quantity |
|---|---|
| Light anti-tank weapons | 17 pieces |
| Explosives (dynamite sticks) | 3,940 pieces |
| 81 mm mortar | 1 set |
| 81 mm mortar rockets | 3 rounds |
| 60 mm mortar | 1 set |
| 60 mm mortar rockets | 43 rounds |
| .50 anti-aircraft machine gun | 1 piece |
| .50 cartridges | 500 rounds |
| M-60 aircraft-mounted machine gun | 1 piece |
| 7.62 mm cartridges ball | 948 rounds |
| 5.56 mm cartridges ball | 3,175 rounds |
| .38 cartridges | 300 rounds |

**Source:** Government Peace Panel (1998, pp. 30–31) sky helicopter gunships, tanks, and other armoured vehicles. Moreover, not a single assault rifle was among the weapons retrieved from the rebels even though it is the standard weapon of a foot soldier. This suggests that the government and military high command were more concerned with the heavier and crew-served weapons that were illegally taken from GRP arsenals and remained unaccounted for than with the standard issue weapons that had been officially handed out to the military elements before they mutinied and were accounted for in the records.[7]

## Recurrent military adventurism and the reform agenda

The much smaller coup attempts of July 2003, February 2006, and November 2007 against the Arroyo presidency included heavily armed members of the government's elite fighting units, such as the army First Scout Ranger Regiment, the Philippine Marine Corps, and the police Special Action Force—which happen to also be frontline units against the Communist and Moro insurgencies. A leaked draft of an unreleased military fact-finding report (the Lopez Report) has found that a number of key players in the February 2006 coup plot had been involved in past coups, including six former YOU members (Pazzibugan, 2006). According to media reports of the draft, these officers had been court-martialled and allowed to resume their military careers, in some cases assuming crucial command posts before reverting to rebellion.

This raises questions about the efficacy and lastingness of the peace settlements with the earlier military rebels. During the negotiations the parties agreed to further talks on a wide-ranging list of topics including electoral reform, good governance, administration of justice, security sector reform, economic development, energy, agrarian reform, barangay development, social justice, and education. In early 1998 technical working committee discussions on the various reforms ended, with both sides taking the view that most if not all of the issues raised by the military rebels had been addressed by 229 new national laws passed by the Ramos administration (Government Peace Panel, 1998).

It was these same issues, however, that were again raised by new the military rebels as well as by other armed groups and sectors of civil society. Indeed, the February 2006 plot to oust the Arroyo regime saw an alliance between military rebels and the main Leftist block of the CPP-NPA-NDFP, groups that have historically been at war with one another (see Box 1.1). Two major fact-finding commissions looked into the ongoing problem of military adventurism, in 1990 (Davide Commission) and in 2003 (Feliciano Commission), but their recommendations have not been effectively implemented.

## Firearms retrieval programs

### 'BARIL' and 'Balik BARIL'

Weapons collection is often undertaken as a part of post-conflict settlements because if weapons are left in circulation they can facilitate a return to armed conflict. In the Philippines, however, rebels have tended to be reintegrated without first being disarmed and demobilized. This is because the government recognizes how unpalatable—and potentially deal-breaking—disarmament and demobilization would be to rebel groups, especially if done coercively. Instead, disarmament programs have been voluntary and have in the main been inadequate, poorly designed, and ill managed.

One of the most significant disarmament programs is the 'Bring a Rifle and Improve Your Livelihood' (BARIL, the vernacular for gun) program, which grew out of concern about the increasing availability of illicit firearms in the Philippines, particularly among rebel groups. It was initially conceived narrowly as a 'buy-back' program open to all armed groups whereby the government purchases their weapons and registers and authenticates those who 'surrendered' them (Muggah, 2004, p. 27). BARIL was promptly transformed into 'Balik-Loob' (Return to the Fold), an expanded version of the program, which included a livelihood-restoration component. 'Balik-BARIL' (Return Gun) was initiated in 1987 as part of the National Reconciliation and Development Program (which became the National Program for Unification and Development). This program is overseen by OPAPP, though it is the AFP that administers the firearms retrieval component (Muggah, 2004, p. 27).

Table 6.2 provides a summary of numbers of weapons turned in under the program (for an analysis of types of weapons handed in by one of the groups, the MNLF, see Table 7.1). The most numerous surrendered weapons were the old M1 Garand, Carbines, and M16s. Few pistols have been surrendered; the absence of the favoured .45 pistol is notable (see Table 7.1).

Table 6.2

## Summary profile of rebel returnees and armaments turned in under the DND-AFP Balik-BARIL project (1 March 1987–20 December 2006)

| Group | Rebel returnees process | Firearms turned in | Explosives turned in |
|---|---|---|---|
| CTM (CPP-NPA-NDFP) | 21,748 | 7,579 | 664 |
| SPSG | 29,775 | 18,502 | 2,882 |
| MNLF | 16,476 | | |
| MILF | 10,217 | | |
| MNLF-Urban | 723 | | |
| MNLF-Reformist Group | 139 | | |
| BMLO | 1,101 | | |
| BMILO | 499 | | |
| MIRC | 96 | | |
| MNLF-MBG | 120 | | |
| MNLF-LC | 404 | | |
| URGs | 129 | 119 | 30 |
| CPLA | 837 | 160 | 0 |
| **Total** | **52,489** | **26,360** | **3,576** |

**Notes:** Acronyms are DND-AFP terminologies; some 'groups' are defunct or questionable as indicated by the notes in parentheses.

| | |
|---|---|
| CTM | Communist Terrorist Movement |
| SPSG | Southern Philippines Secessionist Groups (i.e. Moro rebel groups) |
| BMLO | Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization (defunct) |
| BMILO | Bangsa Muslimin Islamic Liberation Organization (defunct) |
| MIRC | Moro Islamic Revolutionary Committee (questionable) |
| MBG | Misuari Breakway Group (but is actually the MNLF mainstream) |
| LC | Lost Command (no longer under the command and control of the rebel leadership) |
| URGs | Ultra-Rightist Groups (i.e. military rebels, who are not necessarily rightist) |

*Source:* Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Civil Military Operations, J7. Armed Forces of the Philippines, 'DND-AFP Balik-BARIL Project Annual Accomplishment Report CY 2006', p. 3.

## Critical shortcomings

A UNDP desk review has outlined a number of critical shortcomings at each stage of the Balik-BARIL program (Muggah, 2004, p. 28):

1. The program is widely perceived to be a counter-insurgency initiative and, consequently, many combatants appear reluctant to surrender their weapons and subject themselves to the authentication process to qualify for benefits. This is largely because of the program's distinctly military orientation, though the uneven public information and outreach campaign was also a hindrance.
2. The program is believed to have failed to adequately register and authenticate 'surrendering' combatants; consequently, many 'beneficiaries' have been able to apply for and receive benefits in more than one area simultaneously.
3. It appears that poor, unserviceable, and undesirable weapons are turned in, and the financial compensation used to improve the arsenals of armed groups and individuals. Relatively few high-powered military-style arms have been turned in, meaning that a considerable number remain unregistered and in circulation.
4. Weapons surrendered under the program are neither destroyed nor adequately supervised, which means they could be recycled by the AFP back into the community.
5. Due to considerable delays in processing applications and disbursing funds, a significant proportion of the 'beneficiaries' receive neither 'emergency' nor 'livelihood' assistance. These two forms of financial assistance under the Balik-Loob program amounted to PHP 2,500 (USD 50) and PHP 12,500 (USD 250), respectively, in 2004 (Muggah, 2004, p. 28).
6. There are no mechanisms to monitor or evaluate the short-, medium- and long-term outcomes of the program, and thus there appears to be little knowledge of whether it works at all.

The overall conclusion is that the program has failed to permanently disarm either armed combatants or the broader civilian population—which was not the focus of the buy-back but is significant because their weapons could end up back in the hands of armed combatants. Gun buy-backs rarely achieve this: experience in a number of countries shows that at best they lead to the collection of poor-quality weapons while at worst they can unintentionally fuel a black market for weapons (Muggah, 2004, p. 39). Moreover, as Chapter 7 on MNLF integration shows, some integrees handed in one of two or more weapons and passed the other to former MNLF colleagues who did not opt for integration.

## The MILF peace process

Perhaps the keenest analysts of past DDR experiences in the Philippines are the parties involved in the peace process with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Indeed, the aforementioned UNDP desk review acknowledges that its recommendations largely depend on the acceptance of DDR by the MILF (Muggah, 2004, p. 14).

MILF Peace Panel Chairman Mohagher Iqbal said the MILF has initial reservations about the term DDR and would rather use 'normalization' (Vitug, 2006). Writing recently as Salah Jubair, he says the MILF likewise prefers to speak of 'disposition of troops' rather than 'disarmament'. He views 'staying consolidated', even as a non-armed organization in a post-conflict situation, as the opposite of 'demobilization' (Jubair, 2007, p. 171),

OPAPP Undersecretary Ramon G. Santos had proposed using the term 'social integration' with the MILF in lieu of DDR,[8] and in March 2007 President Arroyo issued Administrative Order No. 172 creating a National Committee on Social Integration within the OPAPP. 'Social integration' is defined in the Administrative Order as 'the process involving the management of forces, arms and ammunitions of former rebels and their transition to civilian life', and is described as 'an integral part of the peace process and post-conflict security reform, and as an essential confidence-building and peace-building measure.' It includes an amnesty program and would apparently cover not only post-conflict integration but also pre-settlement integration, i.e. during peace negotiations. The MILF has expressed concern, viewing it as part of a 'surrender' program that 'undermines the other side in the peace talks' and thus 'is inimical to the peace process' (MILF, 2007).

The Policy and Operational Framework of the Social Integration Program (SIP) for Former Rebels attached to AO 172 clearly states that it is the same as

DDR as internationally understood, but that the term is avoided because it 'bears some sensitivities to some sectors of the target group'. And so, 'Arms Management' is used instead of 'Disarmament', 'Force Management' instead of 'Demobilization', and 'Integration' instead of 'Reintegration'. It applies to 'former rebels with expressed desire to re-enter society and return to the fold of the law, even in the absence of a peace accord (as in the case of the NPAs).' As for the MILF, the government envisions discussions on the SIP—in effect DDR—even while peace negotiations are ongoing (MEDCo, 2007).

The MILF has said on numerous occasions that DDR is not yet on the agenda of the talks, though it is clear that they are thinking about possible scenarios and options for when the talks inevitably turn to the issue. Sources comment, for example, that in the event of eventual agreed disarmament of the MILF they would prefer to destroy rather than turn in their weapons so that these are not used by the government for oppression, possibly in phases—e.g. crew-served weapons first, light weapons later—calibrated with the implementation of peace agreements.[9] Jubair envisions that only members of the Internal Security Forces and police would be allowed to bear arms in the post-conflict Bangsamoro Juridical Entity or autonomous region (Jubair, 2007, p. 171).

## Conclusion

The conventional wisdom is that disarmament and demobilization are necessary conditions for a lasting and sustainable peace, but this is often difficult to achieve. Former Swedish Ambassador to the Philippines Annika Markovic recently said, in the context of possible DDR for the MILF: 'DDR does not mean that disarmament and demobilization come first. The R [social and economic reintegration] very often has to come first. By building confidence and a secure environment first and working with development efforts, weapons will no longer be needed' (Vitug, 2006). This sentiment is echoed by DDR expert Peter Swarbrick, who says that DDR should ideally be constructed 'back to front' with economic and social reintegration programs 'well on the way to being in place' before disarmament is attempted (Swarbrick, 2007, p. 19). Disarmament is not necessarily the most critical or urgent component of DDR.

Yet even when development efforts are given primacy, it is valid to explore the integration of small arms measures into development programs as a matter of policy so as to curb or control small arms misuse and proliferation.[10] As President Ramos said in his tenth anniversary assessment of the final peace agreement with the MNLF, '[p]eace without development is just ceasefire. Development without peace is just a temporary project' (Tupas, Lacorte, and Santos, 2006).

A survey by Berdal of disarmament and demobilization experiences after civil wars suggests that disarmament and demobilization are not merely a set of managerial or administrative challenges but 'intensely political processes whose long-term and sustainable impact depend on parallel efforts of political and economic reconstruction to resolve, or ameliorate as far as possible, the root causes of conflict' (Berdal, 1996, p. 5). One must also, Berdal adds, look to the social and cultural aspects of reconstruction.

But as the CPLA experience shows, protracted peace and DDR processes can undermine the rebel group. More than 20 years after reaching a peace agreement the CPLA and the government are still engaged in negotiation, but the CPLA has lost a degree of credibility and support along the way. Not all of the blame for the weakening of the CPLA lies with the government, of course—factionalism within the CPLA made it difficult for the government to decide whether and with whom to pursue negotiations. And often rebel groups seem to forget their core aspirations after achieving an initial peace agreement, a ceasefire, and some confidence-building measures. Swarbrick has recently noted that '[s]ince the political process that follows the signing of a peace or ceasefire accord often represents a continuation of the conflict by other means, it is also possible that the signatory groups will mutate, split, or otherwise transform themselves in unpredictable ways' (Swarbrick, 2007, p. 16).

In the final analysis, it is not just the terminology but the design of DDR that matters. At the same time, to the extent that DDR is rightly treated as an integral part of the peace process with rebel groups, its make-up will depend on the concept, design, and implementation of the wider peace process concerned. In other words, both could lean towards conflict resolution and peace building, or towards counter-insurgency. The latter poses problems in the long term. Simply demobilizing a rebel group or trying to mobilize it against another rebel group may weaken the group, but will not address the root causes of rebellion and so leaves the country or region vulnerable to subsequent rebellions.

## Epilogue (September 2008)

DDR has come to the fore in the wake of the latest—and most serious to date—breakdown in the GRP–MILF peace process in August 2008. A new government peace policy emphasizes DDR as the 'framework' or 'context' for peace negotiations with rebel groups, an approach that has itself been made secondary to that of direct 'authentic dialogues for the people in the communities' where the groups operate. The idea behind this new policy is that 'DDR, as espoused by the communities, will be a notice to armed groups of their rejection of armed struggle; and a way of showing that force of arms does not entitle them to represent our people.'[11]

Shortly after the government's announcement of its new DDR policy, at least two rebel groups currently in peace talks have for the first time officially conceded the validity of DDR as an aspect of that process. First—and somewhat surprisingly given the circumstances of a peace process breakdown and renewed hostilities—the MILF's Vice Chairman for Political Affairs said that DDR:

> *is part of successful conflict resolutions in many parts of the world. It forms part of the comprehensive peace settlement, but it is the last item in the talks. But when DDR is taken up ahead of the comprehensive peace settlement, it is interpreted to be a military approach, not part of a political approach.* (Jaafar, 2008)

A senior MILF peace negotiator came out with his own play on the term 'DDR': 'D to mean Disarm, D to Disown, and R to Reject' (Mastura, 2008). This articulates in less diplomatic terms the MILF's likely approach to the new DDR policy.

A second reaction came from a Communist rebel breakaway group, the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Mindanao (RPM-M, Revolutionary Workers Party of Mindanao), which operates near MILF areas. Similarly to the MILF, the RPM-M said that DDR is 'always an integral part of a peace process but it should be the last stage of the whole process. In fact, DDR should be the logical result of the whole process in which each stage is a build-up for the next and higher, and nearer to a comprehensive peace settlement.' DDR 'should not start or restart with it as the condition for . . . peace talks', as the RPM-M asserts that this would be 'tantamount to saying "surrender first before we talk" or "no peace process at all"' (RPM-M Peace Committee, 2008). In this way, DDR becomes a war strategy rather than a peace strategy.

This stance is reflected in comments by Kristian Herbolzheimer, a researcher who spent time in Mindanao and has studied DDR globally, who writes: 'When a government puts DDR as a precondition for talks it means it is not serious about political negotiations. Rebel groups take up arms to challenge a given political situation, not to negotiate how and when to hand them over' (Herbolzheimer, 2008). DDR in the form of 'buying' the rebels with various financial and economic packages is unlikely to work with highly motivated rebel groups such as the MILF and CPP-NPA-NDFP.

Herbolzheimer adds that DDR is (or is supposed to be) 'a two-way process', and should therefore be matched by security sector reform, i.e. government efforts to reform the military and police. Moreover, policy coherence is vital: DDR is undermined when the government arms civilian vigilantes.

We noted at the start that no complete or comprehensive DDR of an armed group has taken place in the Philippines. With the government's new peace policy emphasizing DDR, it looks set to finally be developed as a complete and comprehensive program. But the initial rebel and civil society reactions cited here suggest that the new DDR policy might not sit well conceptually or politically with the target armed groups. The new policy has the potential to erode the valid role of DDR in peace processes, ignoring the lessons that could be learned from Philippine and wider experiences. ■

## Endnotes

1 See for example Muggah (2004) and UNDP (n.d.).

2 Comment by Alfredo F. Lubang, Regional Representative, Nonviolence International-Southeast Asia, on an early draft of this chapter.

3 'New Armed Forces of the Philippines' was the name given to the AFP in the early post-Marcos months to try to distinguish it from the AFP under Marcos.

4 The limited Cordillera Administrative Region was weakened in 2000 when Estrada issued Executive Order 328 deactivating its three organizational bodies.

5 Reference to the Memorandum of Undertaking is made in Administrative Order No. 18—Providing for the Integration of Qualified Members of the Cordillera People's Liberation Army into the Armed Forces of the Philippines and for other Purposes.

6 The amnesties were issued under presidential Proclamation No. 723 and two subsequent proclamations that extended the initial amnesty deadline. The 5,000 figure is inline with estimates for the maximum number of rebels and supporters of the coup attempts. To put this into context, the size of the AFP increased dramatically under Marcos to 274,000 from 57,000—including a CAFGU force of 65,000, though it has since shrunk to about half that size.

7 Comment by Lubang on an early draft of this chapter.

8 Ramon G. Santos, Undersecretary, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, conversation with the author on 4 September 2006 in Pasay City.

9 This paragraph is based on a comment by Lubang.

10 Comment by Lubang.

11 These new government peace policy formulations are taken from a confidential presidential memorandum of 19 August 2008.

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## CHAPTER 7

# MNLF Integration into the AFP and the PNP: Successful Cooptation or Failed Transformation? (Case Study)

### Soliman M. Santos, Jr.

## Introduction

The integration of Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) elements with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) has been hailed as the most successful aspect of the implementation of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the MNLF. This agreement—the final agreement on the implementation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement—is itself so far the most significant peace settlement between the GRP and a major rebel group in

MNLF patches on a fighter's fatigues. © Arthur C. Fuentes/SSN contemporary times. It provides for autonomy for Muslims in the southern Philippines—known as the Bangsamoro or Moro people—while maintaining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippine Republic (see Chapter 3).

Yet implementation even of the integration aspect of the agreement has not been without its problems, and from the MNLF perspective it remains incomplete. Tripartite talks between the MNLF, GRP, and the mediator, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), begun in late 2007 to review the 1996 Agreement, resulted in the creation of working groups on five key MNLF concerns, including integration with the security forces. A number of independent appraisals of the integration process point to positive outcomes: some 7,000 former MNLF members have been integrated into the AFP and PNP, and have served as a vital and trusted link between the security forces and the community.[1] But many more MNLF members have not been involved in the integration process and have not benefited from accompanying development and livelihood programs—the group's estimated strength when the agreement was signed in 1996 was 17,000. The MNLF continues to stand as a military force and has initiated an increasing number of military engagements in recent years.

This case study briefly looks at the rationale behind integration programs and the added complexities when these involve autonomous arrangements, before turning to the provisions of the final peace agreement and how they were implemented in practice. A section on small arms and light weapons addresses both the firearms turned in by the rebels and those allocated to them on joining the AFP and PNP. The case study ends with a discussion of the impact of DDR-type efforts on the MNLF.

This case study also provides conclusions about MNLF integration in relation to what is supposed to be a broader bilateral Mindanao peace process that has a particular self-determination angle. It comments on the MNLF itself as a non-state armed group that is supposed to have made the transition to autonomous government.

Among the main findings of the study are:

- By avoiding elements of DDR that the MNLF would have rejected, the government was able to secure a peace settlement, but one that left many important issues pending and has resulted in a tentative and partial peace.

- The 7,000 MNLF members who were integrated into the AFP and PNP have tended to show loyalty to their new employer and to have improved standards of living for themselves and their families as a result of their new status. But they represent only a portion of the MNLF's fighting forces.
- The continued deployment of former MNLF members in combat duties against the MILF and MNLF, or to regions outside of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) forces, is problematic for the MNLF.
- There is evidence that integration has yielded positive results in terms of increasing tolerance and overcoming mistrust between Muslim and Christian soldiers and officers at the battalion level, and has improved relations between the AFP and local communities.
- The failure to issue small arms to MNLF integrees was the most destabilizing issue during the integration process.
- The security situation in the ARMM has not been resolved. Disarmament of the MNLF—however limited—has little impact in the absence of corresponding limitations on the AFP and local political warlords and armed groups in Sulu.
- Efforts to disarm the MNLF have been largely ineffective. Buy-back programs have resulted in the surrender of relatively few weapons and have been undermined by the fact that the regular wages earned by integrees increase their purchasing power for small arms within a region where weapons are coveted status symbols.

## Integration and the Final Peace Agreement

Integration of rebel forces into existing government forces is a form of demobilization and reintegration, and is not unusual in post-conflict settlements. It eliminates the threat of contending armed forces carrying out armed hostilities against each other. Other aims of integration and military restructuring in a conflict-prevention context are: to turn the military into more of a national institution by making the officer corps and ranks more representative of the country's population; to make the military more loyal to the state and less subject to regional, ethnic, or personal interests; and to help allay security fears of previously unrepresented groups who feel the military is unresponsive to their security needs or who have suffered abuse from security forces (Iribani and Joaquin, 2003).[2]

But integration carries risks for both sides and hence can be viewed as proof of commitment to a peace process. The rebel side may be taking the bigger risk of losing leverage for its cause; for the government the gamble is whether former enemies will be loyal to its armed forces. In this particular case, a worry for the government is whether the new configuration of forces—both MNLF integration and the formation of Special Regional Security Forces (SRSF)—could be used by the rebel side as a future springboard for armed action against the government. Indeed, according to one source, integration had to be without disarmament and demobilization for the MNLF because it thought of the whole exercise as a stepping stone to independence.[3]

It is worth noting that for autonomous arrangements national defence is normally lodged with central government—which thus retains its monopoly of official armed force—with the autonomous region contributing its share to the national defence force, in this case the AFP. But the day-to-day preservation of peace and order within the autonomous region is normally the responsibility of local police forces, as is reflected in the 1987 Philippine Constitution. The Constitution also establishes, however, that '[t]he defense and security of the [autonomous] regions shall be the responsibility of the National Government' (art. X, s. 21). This impinges on the relative autonomy of the SRSF, making it more a part of the central security forces than of the regional autonomous government. It is no wonder then that the 'disposition of forces'—used instead of the term 'integration'—was among the most contentious issues of the peace negotiations.[4]

The Tripoli Agreement contained provisions for a ceasefire, amnesty, and release of political prisoners, but beyond MNLF integration with the AFP and PNP no mention is made of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). This absence was carried over to the Final Peace Agreement. Former President Fidel V. Ramos explained his government's deft handling of the matter: forcing the issue 'of "demobilizing" or "disarming" the MNLF . . . would have led to an unsolvable impasse. The strategic objective of having a final peace agreement signed—with its attendant political, economic, social and cultural benefits—was more important than belaboring any issue that struck deeply into the honor and prestige of the other party' (Ramos, 1996, pp. 102–03). That was probably the right thing to do at the time, but went against the conventional wisdom of DDR, which is to include specific provisions on DDR in a comprehensive peace agreement rather than leaving this to be 'sorted out' later (Berdal, 1996, p. 74; Swarbrick, 2007, p. 19).

## Issues of contention: number and mode of entry

Between the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and the 1996 Final Peace Agreement, discussions on the implementation of MNLF integration and SRSF formation revolved around two contentious items: the number of MNLF forces and whether they should be integrated as units as the MNLF wanted or individually as the government wanted (Iribani, 2006, p. 317).

In one government account, the MNLF initially proposed that the Autonomous Bangsamoro Islamic Government should have a fixed representation of 25 per cent of the total strength of the AFP (MoFA, 1980, p. 39). It said the MNLF demanded the creation of a 15,000-man standing army, separate from the AFP, but paid, equipped, and trained by the government. The government saw this as a move by the MNLF to maintain a strong army for an eventual war of separation and independence. The second MNLF proposal, made during the ill-fated second stage of negotiations in 1987, was that the SRSF should have an initial strength of 60,000, at least 85 per cent of which should come from the MNLF (Peace and Development Panel, 1987, p. 43). The government pointed out that Muslims in the proposed autonomous region comprise less than 20 per cent of the entire population. It called the MNLF proposal 'a derogation of sovereignty insofar as national defense is concerned [that] reduces the defense posture without the MNLF forces in the region to a point of ineffectiveness if not helplessness. What if things with the MNLF go wrong?' (Peace and Development Panel, 1987, p. 56).

Much of the mutual mistrust between the parties had dissipated by the—successful—third stage of peace negotiations in 1992–96. At one point, MNLF Chairman Misuari even pushed for all MNLF forces to be integrated fully into the AFP (Iribani and Joaquin, 2003). In his recollections of the talks Ramos shows sensitivity to MNLF concerns:

> *Chairman Misuari himself expressed constant worry over the prospect of losing his men to other militant armed groups if Government could not help them during the transition period. It was in this light that the MNLF was pinning its hopes on Government to accommodate its bid to have a large Regional Security Force—both to allay their anxieties over security and to give more teeth to the [transitional implementing structure and mechanism]. . . . The MNLF was not merely concerned over its loss of face in 'demobilizing' its fighters; it also worried about the related and concrete problem of their livelihood and basic needs.* (Ramos, 1996, pp. 86–87)

The final agreement outlined the following steps:

Transitional period (Phase 1):

- Integration of 7,500 MNLF members, 5,750 into the AFP, including 250 in the auxiliary services, and 1,500 into the PNP, plus another 250 items for special or auxiliary services (Final Peace Agreement, 1996, paras. 19.a, 20.a).
- MNLF forces to initially join the AFP as 'separate units within a transition period, until such time that mutual confidence is developed as the members of these separate units are gradually integrated into regular AFP units deployed in the area of the autonomy' (Final Peace Agreement, 1996, para. 20b). This gradual integration of MNLF forces would be *no longer as units but individually*, and *into regular, not special Muslim*, units of the AFP, though limited to those in the autonomous region. For the duration of the transition period, an MNLF officer would be named Deputy Commander for Separate Units of the AFP Southern Command, which at the time was the AFP's biggest unified command, covering the whole of Mindanao (Final Peace Agreement, 1996, para. 20c).[5]

New regional autonomous government (Phase 2):

- Formation of the SRSF as a PNP Regional Command for the new autonomous region, comprising the existing PNP unit in the autonomous region, the MNLF elements, and other residents who may subsequently be recruited into the force. The head of the regional autonomous government shall exercise operational control, general supervision, and disciplinary powers over the PNP Regional Command/SRSF, and shall employ/deploy

its elements through the PNP Regional Director whose appointment he recommends to the President. The government should make every effort to integrate the maximum remaining number of remaining MNLF forces into the later-phase SRSF and other government agencies.
- Creation of a special socio-economic, cultural, and educational program to cater for MNLF forces still not absorbed into the AFP, PNP, and SRSF.

A recent study of the Final Peace Agreement (FPA) notes that:

> *[t]he issue is the true nature of integration: whether it is meant only to mainstream MNLF combatants or whether it is linked to the broader security of the autonomous region, with former MNLF members taking the lead in maintaining law and order . . . Unfortunately, the FPA does not clearly indicate the true intent of the provisions on integration.* (Institute for Autonomy and Governance, 2007, p. 70)

## Implementation of MNLF integration

MNLF integration into the AFP involved three phases: processing, individual training, and on-the-job training and deployment. When integration was first discussed Misuari perceived two possible sources of problems: the cultural gap between Muslims and Christians, who predominate in the MNLF and AFP, respectively; and the difference between the AFP training doctrine and the Islamic principle of human development (Iribani and Joaquin, 2003).

Integration was to have lasted three years from November 1996, the designated transition period, but was extended by a year after the MNLF delayed submitting its list of candidates for processing. According to one assessment of this period, it was relatively successful thanks to flexibility on the part of the AFP and PNP, which waived age, height, and educational requirements for many on the MNLF list that did not meet them, and arranged literacy classes and placement tests where appropriate (Ferrer, 2000). Of particular note was educational assistance for MNLF integrees.[6]

A significant number of MNLF integrees into the PNP—almost 90 per cent of the first batch (Ferrer, 2000)—were not the combatants themselves but their 'successors', i.e. sons and nephews. One estimate from Sulu is that only 30 per cent of all integrees (into both the AFP and PNP) were really MNLF fighters.[7] This was perhaps not surprising since many of the original MNLF fighters were already in their late forties or early fifties, which meant a younger relative could provide longer-term economic support for families of combatants.[8] There were also unverified reports of people buying slots for integration (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, p. 160). The AFP seems to have left it to the MNLF to determine the candidates for integration, with Misuari personally involved in the process.

Candidates took either a 26-week Candidate Soldier Course or a 48-week Officer Candidate Course, after which they organized into separate units for on-the-job-training in rifle or engineer companies under the operational control of regular infantry or engineer units, respectively. Job training involved non-combat missions such as civil–military operations or socio-economic development assistance to the AFP. Final integration into the AFP started immediately upon completion of the job-training phase. The separate units of integree–trainees were deactivated and individually reassigned to regular AFP units under the Southern Command (Depayso, 2004, pp. 3–4).

On the whole, training goals were cumulatively met, though according to the MNLF point person for integration, Major General Abou Amri Taddik, there were training problems in 1996–99 related to 'culture shock' on entering the service-oriented and hierarchical AFP, discrimination, problematic relations between integrees and non-integrees, and lack of trust and confidence (Ferrer, 2000).

There were some early MNLF integree complaints to the effect the AFP did not understand the culture of Muslims and Moros, though an internalization program was designed for both MNLF integrees and AFP personnel to 'enhance the assimilation process of the integrees focusing on their psycho-cultural preparation' (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, p. 161–62). In the beginning, the training schedule did not provide prayer time for Muslims, but this was subsequently corrected, and mosques inside military camps were constructed or repaired. English and Pilipino (Tagalog) was initially used in training, but training staff made an effort to learn and use the local vernacular as much as possible (Ferrer, 2000). Some AFP personnel treated the MNLF integrees as enemies, and some MNLF integrees were not issued firearms even when they

MNLF integrees into the AFP are given medals and promoted for performing well against the MILF in the siege of Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte, which started the 'all-out war' in late March 2000. © Bobby Timonera

were already enlisted personnel in the AFP (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, pp. 161–62).

Other training-related issues were logistical and administrative, such as a lack of facilities for training and billeting, lack of basic supplies to meet daily needs, and delays in releasing salaries and allowances (Ferrer, 2000). The latter, as well as complaints about harsh training, were said to have been the cause of at least one walk-out by some MNLF integrees during training in late 1999, though the AFP said it was because the integrees were concerned that they would be sent for training in Luzon, far from their homes and families (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, p. 162).

## Post-training protests, firearms shortages, and troop attrition

The integration of the agreed total number of 5,750 MNLF members into the AFP was achieved when the final trainees graduated in 2003. Of these, 559 had dropped out of the program, 474 of whom would be replaced. The majority of dropouts (460) were summarily dismissed. Other causes of attrition were desertion (in some cases to rejoin the MNLF), ill-health, and death. According to AFP Southern Command Chief Lt. Gen. Edgardo Espinosa, the dropout rate of about ten per cent is not unusually high (Alipala, 1999). Most of those who were not replaced (66) had been killed in action or other circumstances and so were considered fully integrated, 16 had pending cases against them but had not yet been discharged, and three had deserted.

According to a 2008 government report, a total of 1,650 MNLF members had been integrated into the PNP, with 100 auxiliary slots to be filled during the year (GRP, 2008). Of these, 50 had dropped out of the program. By early 2007, 1,443 PNP integrees had been assigned to the different provincial offices of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and so were considered part of the SRSF, while the remaining 200 or so had been assigned to other regions (GRP, 2008).

The non-issuance of firearms was the most destabilizing issue during the integration process. This was partly because the AFP lacked trust and confidence in the MNLF integrees and partly because insufficient firearms were available for standard issue to troops. Seminars were held for soldiers on the integration component of the Final Peace Agreement in an effort to change attitudes towards the integrees and increase trust in them (Ferrer, 2000).

The AFP and the PNP addressed the lack of firearms available for standard issue to MNLF integrees through selective issuance, additional budgetary allocation requests, and issuance through other means, such as acquisition by the regional autonomous government, including through Governor Misuari's Countryside Development Fund, and personal acquisition (Ferrer, 2000).[9] MNLF members who were integrated as AFP officers were issued .45 pistols, while the enlisted personnel were issued M16 rifles unless they were on garrison duty. Those integrated with the PNP were given 'long' arms (i.e. M16s) and 'short' arms (.45s) depending on the crime situation within their assigned areas. Only 250 firearms were available for the first batch of 496 graduates, however, and 960 short firearms subsequently issued were reportedly funded from Misuari's Countrywide Development Fund (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, p. 34).

The more critical problem was with relationships rather than resources, however. The relationship between regulars and integrees mirrors the senior–

junior relationship since most senior officers are non-integrees, also referred to as regulars or organics. Tensions tended to arise when the AFP command imposed standard sanctions against erring integrees, contributing to some attrition in the latter's ranks. The AFP set up a desk to monitor and respond to this trend (Ferrer, 2000).

## Assessing integration: competing perspectives

The government celebrates integration for having built 'mutual trust' between the government and MNLF (OPAPP, 2006). From the perspective of the MNLF, however, the situation looks different—once sweet, the process of integration has turned sour for the group, as a 2006 report by the OIC Secretary General makes clear (OIC, 2006). At the top of the list of complaints is the government's failure to organize the MNLF integrees into separate units under the command of the deputy commander. The MNLF claims this violates the Final Peace Agreement, though their stance perhaps reveals that the group was not fully aware of the FPA provisions it was signing, since the FPA states that such separate units and the position of deputy commander were meant only for a transition period.

Second is the government's deployment of 'MNLF integrees in combat duties to fight Muslim brothers in the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and recently used to fight against the MNLF forces' (OIC, 2006). MNLF integrees were killed in the encounters and others have gone on absence without leave (OIC, 2006).

Third, the SRSF created under the New Organic Act for the ARMM (Republic Act No. 9054) is 'special' in name only 'because it is essentially the same Central security forces' (OIC, 2006). The MNLF—perhaps erroneously since the composition of the SRSF under RA 9054 mirrors that in the FPA—views the Tripoli Agreement as providing for a separate framework for the SRSF and the Central security forces, with the rationale that security forces not hostile to the inhabitants should be deployed in the autonomous region. According to the MNLF, certain provisions were inserted unilaterally by the government, such as the provision that members of the MNLF who are integrated into the SRSF 'may be deployed in the autonomous region *or elsewhere in the Republic* *as may be determined by the proper police authorities*' (art. XIII, s. 3 of RA 9054, emphasis added). '[T]his will give rise to a situation when the MNLF elements in SRSF will be deployed in Manila or in the northernmost part of the Philippines or elsewhere outside the area of autonomy which is absurd and repugnant to the letter and spirit of the 1996 Peace Agreement and more particularly . . . the Tripoli Agreement' (Parcasio, 2006a).

Beyond the opinions of the leaders of the parties to the agreement, the litmus test of success or failure of integration is at the level of the AFP field units containing MNLF integrees. It is difficult to find broad-based material on the subject, but one in-depth assessment from 2004 of attitudes in a single battalion suggests that initial resistance of AFP troops to the idea of MNLF integration has been to a large extent overcome. The study is of the 57th Infantry Battalion operating in Muslim Mindanao, whose experience is thought to be representative rather than exceptional among the military units affected by the integration process (Depayso, 2004).

In combat, AFP unit leaders said they had confidence leading a patrol containing MNLF integrees, finding them reliable in searching for the enemy, be it MILF rebels, kidnap-for-ransom groups, or other lawless elements. MNLF integrees are described as being aware of their duties and responsibilities. Some operational tasks could be delegated to them, though they are said to have some difficulty with established combat Standard Operating Procedures because of their background as former rebels used to different tactics and procedures.

AFP unit leaders also expressed confidence in the intelligence information provided by MNLF integrees, describing it as generally highly reliable and yielding positive results such as the confiscation of high-powered firearms during operations. Because of their familiarity with the area, people, and language, integrees are often sent on surveillance missions against enemy targets. Their level of awareness of security and discipline with confidential information was criticized, however.

In civil–military operations, the MNLF integrees could be relied upon to liaise with community and local leaders. Their familiarity with the local people and language improved public relations for the battalion. They were particularly helpful in establishing cooperatives for livelihood programs and delivering basic literacy and health care programs. In a separate assessment, a top army general said the biggest contribution was the build-up of the military intelligence database from integrees in civil–military operations (Ferrer, 2000).

There was an observable decline in crime in the early years of MNLF integration into the PNP in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, especially in Jolo (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, p. 163). The battalion's records reveal that during the first two years after MNLF integration it confiscated more illegal firearms, received more rebels returning to the fold of the law, and enhanced its public relations with the community. Yet only 47.1 per cent of battalion unit leaders agreed with the suggestion that the battalion's performance had improved since the incorporation of MNLF integrees, reflecting continued prejudice towards the former MNLF members (Depayso, 2004).

As for AFP regulars, while they generally displayed acceptance of the MNLF integrees, they did so 'with little enthusiasm or not as overwhelming as the MNLF integrees responded . . . What is surprising and bothering, however, is the *preference of both respondents to be in separate organizations* [units] if they are given the choice' (Depayso, 2004). Only half of the Christian soldiers approved of MNLF integration. On the indicator of 'confidence of unit leaders in leading a patrol with integrees as members', unit leaders tended to 'merely agree' with the statement, while most integrees tended to 'strongly agree' (Depayso, 2004).

MNLF integrees felt accepted in general by the regular troops and did not feel discriminated against. There was a feeling among them that the regulars had come to understand the spirit of the FPA, which includes provisions for integration (Depayso, 2004). MNLF integrees did not express sadness or evince low morale when fighting fellow Muslims, such as the MILF or certain kidnap-for-ransom groups, saying that duty came before anything else. The majority said their personal and family life had improved as integrees; indeed, being able to send their children to school is the one common concern of MNLF integrees and other ex-mujahideens who have joined government forces (Gomez, 2005; Maulana, 2006; *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2006; Fernandez and Maitem, 2006).

According to Depayso, MNLF integration contributed to Muslim–Christian *social integration*, which involves not only the soldiers themselves but their families. In the battalion studied, respect and space was given for the religious beliefs and practices of the Muslim integrees, who in turn became more tolerant of some of the practices of Christian soldiers, such as drinking alcohol. 'This social "experiment" had merged two diverse cultures with different religious beliefs to live and work as one. Despite their bitter past, they have to protect each other by the very nature of their job' (Depayso, 2004). Incidentally, 'social integration' has emerged as the government's alternative term for DDR, in particular in its negotiations with the MILF (Chapter 6).

## Disarmament or rearmament?

MNLF integrees who joined the AFP were offered the 'Bring a Rifle and Improve Your Livelihood' (BARIL) program, a modified version of the government's 'Balik-BARIL' (Return Gun) project for Communist rebel returnees. A total of 4,874 firearms, mostly old M1 Garands and carbines, were turned in by MNLF integrees in 1996–99. Some probably came from government sources, though the serial number was usually etched out by either seller or buyer to minimize tracing (see Chapter 18 on sources of MNLF weapons). Few pistols have been surrendered, particularly the favoured .45 pistol. MNLF integrees were compensated for each firearm surrendered. The firearms were then considered government property and subsequently issued to integrees during training and deployment. Those opting to retain their firearms were required to register them. High-calibre and crew-served weapons did not qualify for retention and had to be turned in (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, p. 163).

MNLF integrees who joined the PNP were *not* required to turn in their firearms, possibly because of the PNP's lack of firearms and hence the preference for integrees to bring their own when needed for duty.[10]

According to Ferrer (2000), the BARIL program and integration of MNLF members into the AFP and PNP made no dent in the number of weapons held by the MNLF network, if that is considered still to include MNLF integrees. The integrees' new-found status as regular wage-earners increased their purchasing power, including for more firearms, newer and more powerful than those turned in. Moreover, the AFP initially offered integrees a system of loans to buy guns, though the loans were reportedly stopped after some 70 per cent of the integrees took advantage of this facility and were left with little take-home pay after loan deductions (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, p. 165).

Table 7.1

## Type of weapons surrendered under Balik-BARIL by MNLF integrees into the AFP, 1996–99

| Type | Number |
|---|---|
| Automatic rifles | |
| M1 Garand | 1,760 |
| Carbine | 1,563 |
| M16/1R15 | 884 |
| FAL G1/FN | 97 |
| Springfield | 21 |
| AK47 | 20 |
| M14 | 9 |
| AR18 | 1 |
| M653 | 3 |
| M653 (craft manufactured ) | 1 |
| Machine guns | |
| Thompson | 97 |
| Thompson .45 | 56 |
| 9 mm Ingram sub-machine gun | 11 |
| BAR light machine gun | 9 |
| 30 FMG (folding machine gun) | 3 |
| Grenade launchers | |
| M79 | 198 |
| M203 | 1 |
| Pistols, revolvers, and low-powered rifles | |
| .38 pistol | 57 |
| .45 pistol | 34 |
| .380 HM | 8 |
| .22 HM | 3 |
| .380 | 11 |
| Shotgun | 21 |
| Unspecified craft weapons | 4 |
| 30 CBH | 2 |
| **TOTAL** | **4,874** |

**Sources:** Joint AFP-MNLF Secretariat Office (JAMSO), Armed Forces of the Philippines, 'Update of the MNLF Integration Program (as of 15 August 1999).'

### Box 7.1 **Tausug gun culture**

Journalist Noralyn Mustafa, herself a Tausug, has written about the Tausug gun culture (*Philippine Daily Inquirer,* 2000). She says that, among the Tausug, men are not only providers but also, more importantly, protectors and defenders, of the family's honour, the family itself, especially the female members, the home, the turf and other possessions, and in a broad sense the clan, in that order. A man's only reason for living is to fulfil this obligation; failure to do so results in condemnation and social sanction expressed in the extremely derisive vernacular term *dayyus*. For Tausug men to fulfil the role of protector which their society has imposed on them almost from the age of puberty, they must, first and foremost, have a weapon, formerly the kris (Tausug sword), but in modern times a gun. These are undeniably extensions of his masculinity, but also reflect his capability as a provider, since he needs money to purchase guns. The more guns he has, the more followers he must have, and the more powerful he becomes.

Even those MNLF members who turned over firearms were not necessarily disarmed, since MNLF members usually have more than one firearm. According to one integree, guns that were not turned in were passed to MNLF comrades who were not integrated (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, p. 165).

One factor contributing to the low turnover of MNLF firearms is the relatively low valuation of surrendered weapons under the Balik-BARIL program in relation to the black market for small arms and light weapons (Chapter 10). For example, a foreign-made .45 pistol would raise PHP 1,500–4,000 (USD 30–90) under Balik-BARIL, compared with about PHP 25,000 (USD 550) on the black market. An M16 armalite raised PHP 9,000–15,000 (USD 200–330) under Balik-BARIL, but could be sold for PHP 30,000–45,000 (USD 670–1,000) on the black market (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, pp. 164–65).[11] Many if not most of these arms were originally AFP standard issue (Ferrer, 2000).

## Demobilization or remobilization?

Though 7,000 MNLF elements integrated into the AFP and PNP is a significant number, it falls far short of the estimated 17,700 MNLF fighters active as of September 1996, shortly after the signing of the Final Peace Agreement (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, p. 160). Moreover, the 7,000 integrees cannot simply be subtracted from the estimated 17,700 MNLF fighters since, as mentioned above, a significant number were not the combatants themselves but their so-called successors.

CAMP AMILHA

An MNLF meeting at Camp Amilhamja in Langpas, Indanan, Sulu. © Arthur C. Fuentes/SSN

The Final Peace Agreement did not attempt to demobilize the whole MNLF fighting force, but instead provided for 'a special socio-economic, cultural and educational program to cater to MNLF forces not absorbed into the AFP, PNP and the SRSF' (FPA, 1996, para. 20a). In addition to the 7,000 or so MNLF integrees, the United Nations (UN) Multi-Donor Program (MDP) of 'Peace and Development Communities' (PDCs) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) 'Livelihood Enhancement for Peace' (LEAP) program claim to have together reintegrated more than 50,000 MNLF members between 1997 and 2004 (Muggah, 2004), though this figure is likely to refer to the MNLF mass base rather than solely combatants.

Many of those who did not opt for or could not be absorbed by the integration program turned to farming. Some lost hope in the struggle, sensing that only those with connections benefited from the Final Peace Agreement. Others formed their own groups or joined existing groups, including small breakaway or 'lost' MNLF commands, kidnap-for-ransom gangs, and terrorist groups (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, p. 160). By some accounts, many MNLF dropouts joined the more radical MILF (see Chapter 3). This windfall for the MILF was confirmed by military sources and by former MILF Vice Chair for Military

Affairs Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, who estimated a surge in MILF strength from 8,000 in 1996 to 15,420 in mid-1999, and in firearms from 10,227 at year-end 1998 to 11,351 by June 1999 (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, p. 160), though at least one senior AFP general in Mindanao at that time says the reported number of MNLF defectors to the MILF has been insignificant (Ferrer, 2000).

One critical assessment of MNLF integration is that it is really more a subset of the overall livelihood and socio-economic program for ex-combatants than an effective program for demobilization. The assumption underlying the government's policy seems to be that demobilization would somehow naturally follow the advent of autonomy for peace and development (Ferrer, 2000). There have been significant deficits on all counts, however, including demobilization, autonomy, peace, and development.

The peace brought about by the 1996 Final Peace Agreement, including MNLF integration, was only tentative. It was effective in MNLF areas of Southwestern (or Island) Mindanao but not in MILF-controlled areas of Central (in Mainland) Mindanao. According to Ferrer's assessment of MNLF integration and the broader implementation of the Final Peace Agreement, the MNLF retains a military force that could be remobilized in the event of a breakdown in the peace process, with 'no guarantees that the integrees will not turn against their new employer' (Ferrer, 2000). Indeed in November 2001, February 2005, November 2005, and April 2007, the MNLF in its main provincial base in Sulu did remobilize for armed hostilities against the AFP. In February 2005 there were reports of integrees going AWOL and fighting on the MNLF side: according to one local source, 283 of the integrees who were truly former MNLF fighters are back with the MNLF, while '100 plus' more went AWOL without returning to the MNLF.[12]

Yet the majority of integrees have remained loyal to their new employer, the AFP. At least for the MNLF, 'the integration component served as a good confidence-building measure supportive of the other aspects of the Agreement' (Ferrer, 2000). And while the 2005 Sulu hostilities pitted the AFP against both the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and the MNLF, the latter two groups seemingly on the same side of battle, the AFP's 2006 'Oplan Ultimatum' against ASG and Jemaah Islamiyah instead saw the MNLF—and not just the integrees—on the same side as the AFP. The MNLF provided valuable intelligence against the

ASG. A local journalist has concluded that this turn of events has finally dispelled any doubts about the MNLF as a peace partner of the GRP (Alipala, 2006b).

Overall, the conflict with the MNLF has been transformed from a *mainly* military into a *mainly* political conflict, though this process has been undermined to some degree by the MNLF's failure to reinvent itself as a political rather than primarily military force (Chapter 18). An endorsement of the process is the simple fact that, despite its criticisms of government failures to fully implement the FPA, the MNLF clings to the agreement as 'the only peace formula in place to arrest the conflict in the south' (Parcasio, 2006b).

## Conclusion

Mats R. Berdal wrote that 'the *sine qua non* of integration lies in creating basic trust between parties. The extent to which trust is established determines whether a merger translates into a genuine integration' (Berdal, 1996, p. 52). If this is the measure of success, then MNLF integration has been only partially successful. Some lessons can be learned from the experience.

MNLF Women's Auxiliary Corps in formation with MNLF flag in the background at the premises of the Bwansa Elementary School in Indanan, Sulu, August 2006. © Julie S. Alipala

First, DDR should be clearly made part of the peace settlement—though alternative terms for DDR could be applied—and subsequently institutionalized for its sustainable implementation, so that it is not a 'one-time deal'. DDR without rehabilitation is futile. The value of DDR to its intended recipients cannot be assumed; it must be explained, and the way it is explained is crucial. For instance, reintegration, regardless of its probative value to peace, will tend to be associated with Filipino colonial integration or assimilation, which is resented by many Moros.[13]

Disarmament of the MNLF without corresponding limitations on the AFP and local political warlords and armed groups in Sulu will have a limited impact. It could play into the hands of the Abu Sayyaf, since weakening the MNLF could diminish its proven potential as an effective counter-force to the group. It could also undermine support for the peace process. Indeed a number of Sulu women leaders have expressed concern over militarized zones and over the antagonistic behaviour of military personnel, such as handling weapons in populated market places (Salapuddin, 2006). For DDR to be successful, the AFP must pull out or pull back to a considerable distance, leaving the local police—with integrees—and the MNLF itself to maintain peace and order. Moreover, given the evidence of the past leakage of weapons from armed forces arsenals into rebel hands, by bringing in more weaponry to fight the Abu Sayyaf, the AFP could inadvertently end up 'modernizing' the MNLF's arsenal. This would reverse the—admittedly limited and one-sided—disarmament.

One important lesson from the MNLF integration experience is that DDR is best done bilaterally, i.e. with the participation of the rebel group in program design. Apart from the substantive contribution that a rebel perspective might provide, the process of bilateral participation is important 'for the purposes of legitimacy, improved targeting and capacity building' (Muggah, 2004, p. 35). In this particular case, the issue of self-determination should also be reflected in the DDR program, not just in the main political settlement. From the perspective of regional autonomous governance, the SRSF is even more crucial than MNLF integration into the AFP and PNP. According to the Cotabato-based Institute for Autonomy and Governance, 'a meaningful exercise of the right to self-determination must necessarily involve some kind of Moro control over security of their areas' (Institute for Autonomy and Governance, 2007,

p. 70). The FPA provisions on a PNP Regional Command *as the SRSF* are self-defeating as far as self-determination is concerned—the MNLF seems to have missed this point, arguing instead that the FPA provisions for the SRSF have not been implemented largely because the provisions for the new regional autonomous government have not been implemented.[14]

Also important is providing a place for the local population to participate in DDR, since they are, after all, the ultimate stakeholders in peace. The various sectors of the peace constituency can provide their own substantive inputs and can help create an atmosphere conducive to DDR as well as to the overall peace process (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, pp. 167–68). After all, when one speaks of self-determination, this pertains not primarily to the negotiating rebel group but to the people they claim to represent. ■

## Endnotes

1 The figure of 7,000 is widely cited in the Philippines, though some sources cite higher figures. See for example Makinano and Lubang (2000, p.29).

2 The late Iribani was the MNLF Special Peace Emissary, Peace Talks Secretariat Chairman, and Spokesman during the 1992 to 1996 peace negotiations.

3 Iribani and Joaquin (2003), citing an interview with Nur Misuari, MNLF Chairman, by the Institute for National Security Studies, National Defense College of the Philippines, conducted at his detention quarters in Fort Sto. Domingo, Sta. Rosa, Laguna on 25 June 2003. According to Prof. Octavio A. Dinampo of Mindanao State University, commenting on an early draft of this chapter, no one within the MNLF other than Misuari knew of the DDR program.

4 Interview with Nur Misuari.

5 In August 2006 the AFP Southern Command was divided into the Western Mindanao Command and the Eastern Mindanao Command, which roughly cover the Moro and Communist fronts of armed conflict in Mindanao, respectively.

6 Comment on an early draft of this chapter by Merliza M. Makinano, Director, International Labor Affairs Service, Department of Labor and Employment (ILAS–DOLE), Philippines.

7 Comment on an early draft of this chapter by Dinampo, on 27 June 2006.

8 According to Makinano and Lubang (2000) most of the integrees in the AFP are beyond the required age limit for commission or enlistment into service. Of the 160 officers, only 49 2nd Lieutenants (or 30%) are under 31 years of age. Most of these officers are aged 32–41 years old, while 20 are within the 42–50-year-old age bracket (which is already nearing the retirement age of 56).

9 Ferrer cites her interview with Supt. Abdelgardan Indanan Ali, Battalion Commander, Special Mobile Group, PNP Regional Command at Camp S.K. Pendatun, Parang, Maguindanao, 27 October 1999.

10 The comment was made by Alfredo F. Lubang on a draft of this chapter on 28 June 2008, and reflects the findings of interviews he conducted with PNP officials.

11 US dollar rates at 1 September 2000.

12 Comment by Dinampo, 27 June 2006.

13 Comment by Dinampo, 27 June 2006.

14 Inputs of 'MNLF Joint Working Group on SRSF and Unified Command of the Autonomous Region in Mindanao Joint Working Group Meeting', 4 January 2008, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, Makati City, Philippines.

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## CHAPTER 8

# The Foibles of an Armed Citizenry: Armed Auxiliaries of the State and Private Armed Groups in the Philippines (Overview)

Herman Joseph S. Kraft

## Introduction

The Philippine government's twin battles against Communist insurgents and Muslim secessionists and a context of high crime and a poorly functioning criminal justice system have opened up space for a plethora of armed groups to emerge. These include more than one million civilians who have been recruited into official auxiliary groups by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP). They also include private armed groups recruited and armed by local business leaders and politicians. Finally, there are vigilante groups, many of which are anti-Communist and fundamentalist Christian in inspiration.

This chapter looks at each of these groups in turn. It addresses the many extrajudicial killings that have been carried out by members of armed groups, the majority of which have gone unpunished. A high level of impunity is a symptom of a sluggish judicial system, but it also suggests tolerance on the part of the security forces for the excesses of their civilian proxies. The state is compromised when armed civilian groups aligned with its interests violate national and international laws.

Whereas other chapters in this volume centre on efforts to curb armed violence by the respective armed groups discussed, there have been few coordinated efforts to tackle the proliferation of armed civilian groups and their use of licensed and unlicensed weapons. A police task force has been set up to investigate political killings by armed groups, but it has had limited success. The accompanying case study on Abra province (Chapter 9) looks at attempts to dismantle private armies and purge local police forces of commanders with ties to these groups.

Among the main findings of this chapter are:

- The Philippines security forces are overstretched and are heavily reliant on auxiliary forces. Members of auxiliary forces are paid less and are not trained to the same level as ordinary soldiers or police officers. Many are armed by the security forces that command them.
- Among the auxiliary security forces are some 53,000 members of the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units (CAFGU) and 800,000 of the Civilian Volunteer Organizations (CVOs). The latter are supposed to provide unarmed assistance to the police but have reportedly acquired firearms in some parts of the country, including Mindanao.[1]
- Although ostensibly vital for supporting the government's efforts to counter a Communist insurgency and Muslim secessionist groups in Mindanao, armed auxiliaries have been accused of involvement in the deaths of more than 111 anti-government activists—mainly members of legal leftist organizations—as well as the murders of 26 journalists since 2001 (Melo Report, 2007). The official security forces have failed to rigorously investigate and punish the perpetrators of political killings.
- A permissive climate for firearms use and the perceived failure of security forces to curb crime are two factors that contribute to the proliferation of private armies. In 2007, 93 private armed groups were officially identified (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2007a).
- Auxiliary armed groups tend to be armed with M1 Garand and M14 rifles and M1 and M2 carbines, which are older models than those used by the regular armed forces. Many members of private armies, however, carry high-powered weapons, including M16s, AK47s, Belgian FN-FALs, and Israeli Galils.[2]
- The majority of human rights violations in which armed auxiliary groups are implicated involve the use of registered small arms. This bucks the general trend in the Philippines, where overall only ten per cent of crimes involve small arms, but, of these, 94 per cent involve unlicensed small arms (Kraft, 2004, p. 75).

## Armed auxiliary groups and the human rights situation in the Philippines

After 2001, the number of assassinations of activists, mostly members of left-wing political parties and community organizers from rural areas, increased noticeably. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo established an independent commission to look into the deaths, which had become an embarrassment to her on the international stage. The resulting report (the 'Melo Report') was made public on 22 January 2007. It reported the human rights group Karapatan's claim that at least 724 activists had been killed since President Arroyo came to power, Amnesty International's official list of 244 victims, and the report by PNP Task Force Usig, the group responsible for investigating the killings, of 111 cases (Melo Report, 2007). Many of the killings were carried out in broad daylight by hooded killers on motorcycles against *non-combatant* known members of legal leftist organizations.

While the Melo Report does not identify those directly responsible for the killings nor suggest that military personnel were directly involved, it castigates the military for failing to investigate aggressively reports of the involvement of individuals or groups associated with the AFP. Despite claims by senior military officials that the AFP does not consider assassinations an acceptable part of warfare,[3] the Melo Report clearly notes that allegations surrounding the killing of political activists directly implicate forces under the command of the military, including members of the CAFGU (Gloria, 2006, p. 19). UN Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Killings Philip Alston later concluded, after a fact-finding mission in February 2007, that a significant number of the killings involved the AFP or its agents, even though he absolved the Arroyo administration of blame.

The Commission also looked into deaths of journalists in different parts of the country. According to the PNP, 26 media professionals had been killed since 2001. The perpetrators tended to be associated not with the military but with local politicians or business interests (Melo Report, 2007). In contrast to the few arrests and prosecutions resulting from investigations into the killings of political activists, PNP Deputy Director General Avelino I. Razon, Jr. reported that 21 of the 26 deaths of journalists had been resolved, though this simply means that they have been passed on to the public prosecutions service.[4]

The Commission also considered a third category of killings, namely, those of farmer-activists. Some of these deaths appeared to be linked to farmers' ties to the New People's Army (NPA, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines); others were peasant leaders and organizers who had come into conflict with landlords rather than the military.

All the cases placed before the Melo Commission point to a continuing malaise within Philippine society: groups armed either by the state or through private means proliferate because their existence has been given some form of legal standing by the state or agents of the state that directly delegate to them or harness their assistance in some way. Their irregular or auxiliary status blurs the lines of accountability to constitutionally mandated authorities. From a legal perspective, the Philippine government can justify their existence as being consistent with the constitutional requirement that Philippine citizens render personal, military, or civil service to defend the state against security threats. For human rights advocates and other critics of the government, however, these groups are convenient legal covers for individuals and groups engaged in vigilante activities, and the legal justification established by the state for their existence helps to create a culture of impunity.[5]

## Armed auxiliaries of the state and private armed groups in the Philippines

The practice of citizens armed by the state or by private interests participating in campaigns against 'enemies of the state' has a long history in the Philippines. The Kapampangans of Pampanga were extensively recruited and armed by Spain against rebellions in different parts of Luzon; Macabebes, also of Pampanga, were famous scouts for the US army in the Filipino–American War at the turn of the 20th century; and, during the Second World War, privately-financed, -armed, and -organized outfits were formed to protect the estates of landed families who cooperated with the Japanese military (Asia Watch, 1990, p. 40). After the Philippines gained political independence in 1946, the Philippine government continued the practice by involving private armed groups recruited by landowning families in its offensives against Huk insurgents. They were joined by groups armed by the military itself, which ranged from religious cults to Aeta tribesmen. In 1976, former President Ferdinand Marcos created the Integrated Civilian Home Defense Force (ICHDF) of private citizens armed by the state to help counter the NPA threat.[6]

What differentiates these groups from other private armed groups in the country—particularly insurgent and rebel forces but also outright criminal organizations—is that they can claim either an explicit legal status or at least the grudging tolerance of agents of state. This is problematic when members of these groups are accused of human rights violations, especially on matters relating to the Communist insurgency and the Muslim separatist movement. In most cases, these acts have nothing to do with state-sanctioned operations against 'enemies of the state' but instead involve private interests.

There are two different sets of armed auxiliaries in the Philippines. The first is made up of groups sanctioned and organized by national state authorities. These are the CAFGUs and the CVOs—auxiliary forces under the operational control of regular military and police forces which are usually armed from government arsenals. The second is made up of various privately raised and organized groups that largely serve private and business interests but are tolerated by state authorities. It is not uncommon for these groups to be called upon to assist in operations involving state security.

Both types of group have proliferated and prospered because of three principal factors. The first is the long-standing insurgencies. The regular forces of the AFP have never been sufficient to counter one insurgency movement effectively, much less two, and so have relied on auxiliary forces for area defence. These armed auxiliary forces are not disciplined or trained to the level of the regulars.[7] Second, the emphasis on counter-insurgency has stretched government resources and diminished its ability to provide security—among other services—for the general public. Consequently, private security forces were raised by political and business groups as protection against increasingly aggressive and well-armed criminal organizations, as well as the activities of insurgents. Third, this situation created a spiral of violence fed by the proliferation of firearms, which are easy to procure thanks to weak Philippine laws and a permissive attitude within Philippine society towards gun ownership and use (Misalucha, 2004, pp. 131–32).

## The Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units (CAFGUs)

The AFP has been working hard to correct two general impressions about the CAFGU. The first involves its relationship with its antecedents. The second has to do with the idea that the CAFGU is a *paramilitary* organization.

The origin of the CAFGU is usually traced to the dissolution of the ICHDF which, for the two decades of the Marcos dictatorship, was supposed to assist the military in counter-insurgency but became notorious for poor discipline and human rights abuses. The ICHDF was largely under the operational control of the Philippine Constabulary, itself known for human rights abuses. It is difficult to establish a reliable tally of violations committed by members of the ICHDF, but its reputation was such that its dissolution was one of the principal demands made by opponents of Marcos when Corazon Aquino came to power in 1986.

Within a year of the ICHDF's dissolution, however, Executive Order 264 was issued on 25 July 1987 urging the Secretary of National Defense to 'cause the organization of the Citizen Armed Force into Geographical Units' nationwide to confront the growing Communist insurgency. This led to the formal cre-

Members of the CAFGU—a paramilitary group set up by the Philippine government to augment the armed forces—wait between patrols in a public park in Isabela City on the island of Basilan. © Lucian Read/Small Arms Survey ation of the CAFGU. The concept of the CAFGU is supposed to be based on the 'citizen armed force' mandated by the 1987 Philippine Constitution;[8] Republic Act 7077, also known as the AFP Reservist Act of 1991, makes the CAFGU an integral part of the AFP reserve force.

Unlike the ICHDF of the Marcos era, the CAFGU is part of the regular reserve force and not a paramilitary unit convened only for counter-insurgency. It is integrated into the military chain of command and is subject to all applicable military laws, rules, and regulations. Like other members of the military reserve force, CAFGU members receive formal basic military training. They are put under the direct operational control and supervision of a commanding officer of the AFP, usually the commander of the manoeuvre battalion assigned to a particular geographic area. Each CAFGU member receives a reservist serial number which officially makes him or her part of the military. As such, each CAFGU member receives an allowance and other AFP benefits (see Table 8.1). Because the CAFGU belongs to the AFP Reserve Force, the Philippine government and the AFP reject the characterization of the CAFGU as either a militia or a paramilitary unit.

The CAFGU is supposed to comprise officers and soldiers in the active force and all 'qualified reservists' residing in a particular locality. The military area

Table 8.1

**Allowances and pay of CAFGU active auxiliary, as of 2006**

| Allowance | Amount |
|---|---|
| Subsistence | PHP 60/day. PHP 21,900/annum (USD 495) |
| Combat clothing and individual equipment: | |
| Old recruit | PHP 3,980 (USD 80) |
| New recruit | PHP 6,595 (USD 133) |
| Death benefits: | |
| Battle casualty | PHP 18,000 (USD 363) |
| Non-battle | PHP 6,000 (USD 121) |
| Burial services | PHP 2,000 (USD 40) |
| Special financial assistance | PHP 10,950 (USD 221) |

**Note:** Currency conversion rates as of 1 December 2006.

**Source:** Headquarters of the Philippine Army, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, G3, 2006.

commander screens candidates, with input from local executives and civic and business leaders who make up the Peace and Order Council. After selection, members are enrolled in company-sized units referred to as the CAFGU Active Auxiliary (CAA). The CAAs are activated through a process of selective mobilization when insurgent activity is high.

Table 8.2 illustrates how the number of troops in the CAAs decreased after 1994 when an internal split had depleted NPA regulars to around 5,000 nation-

Table 8.2

**Annual strength of CAFGU Active Auxiliaries, 1988–2006**

| Year | Strength |
|---|---|
| 1988 | 37,360 |
| 1989 | 49,721 |
| 1990 | 69,747 |
| 1991 | 68,211 |
| 1992 | 75,461 |
| 1993 | 67,691 |
| 1994 | 55,581 |
| 1995 | 37,178 |
| 1996 | 36,326 |
| 1997 | 33,716 |
| 1998 | 32,748 |
| 1999 | 32,748 |
| 2000 | 32,748 |
| 2001 | 41,979 |
| 2002 | 51,320 |
| 2003 | 52,220 |
| 2004 | 52,748 |
| 2005 | 52,748 |
| 2006 | 52,748 |

**Source:** Headquarters of the Philippine Army, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, G3, 2006.

wide, and peace talks between the government and the MNLF were reaching their final stages. Numbers began to rise again with the intensification of the war against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the recovery of the NPA (see Chapters 1 and 3). With the heightening of NPA attacks in 2005–06 and President Arroyo's directive to end the Communist insurgency by 2010, the AFP stated its intention in 2006 to recruit a further 8,000 members to the CAFGU in some 90 CAA companies (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2006).

By holding and defending areas cleared of insurgent influence and presence, CAAs free up regular AFP units for the more difficult task of going after armed insurgent forces. Their role is integrated into the Philippine National Internal Security Plan, in which they are regarded as important parts of the Philippine Territorial Defense System and a vital tool for counter-insurgency (Navarro, 2004; Cabides, 2002). Maintaining the CAAs is more economical than increasing the regular forces. It costs the AFP around PHP 120,000 (USD 2,200) to maintain a private annually in the regular force but only PHP 30,000 (USD 560) for a CAFGU member (Pal, 1999; *Sulong Update*, 2005, p. 3).[9]

The advantages of the CAFGU system are undermined by human rights concerns. As noted above, the CAFGU was established on the footprint of the dissolved ICHDF. Given this background, its proponents tried to give assurances that the CAFGU would be better organized and supervised (Arcala Hall, 2004). But these safeguards seem to have been ignored, at least initially, since many CAFGU recruits were drawn from the ICHDF and the private vigilante groups and paramilitary forces disbanded and outlawed by the 1987 Constitution.[10] The screening process failed to weed out certain individuals who were later discovered to have criminal records (PHRIC, 1993, p. 17). Moreover, the involvement of local politicians in the selection of qualified volunteers for the CAA laid the CAAs open to charges of being part of local private armies, since volunteers were sometimes identified with the same politicians involved in the selection process.[11]

Within the first five years of its existence, at least 533 cases of human rights-related incidents involving CAFGUs were recorded by human rights groups and other civil society groups (PHRIC, 1993, p. 5). The Commission on Human Rights recorded 853 cases of murder, execution, torture, disappearances, and illegal arrests and detention filed against 1,070 CAFGU members from 1987 to 1999 (Cabides, 2002, p. 27). For the most part, critics of the CAFGU programme attribute this to the poor training and discipline of those inducted into the CAAs. The Philippine Human Rights Information Center attributed the abuses to sociological and cultural conditions: in underdeveloped rural communities where many of the CAAs are raised, unemployed young men who join the CAFGU find status and power in the possession of a firearm and the authority of a uniform—the abuses of which then become an expression of power (PHRIC, 1993, p. 17).

Special CAA (SCAA) companies cause particular concern to human rights campaigners. They were established in 1989 after Congress cut the budget for the military and, in particular, the CAFGU programme. SCAAs are similar to CAAs in that they are subject to military discipline and the Articles of War but differ in that their primary function is to protect the property and interests of private corporations, business entities, or Local Government Units (LGUs). Their logistical requirements for operational purposes—including arms and ammunition—and even their allowances are provided by either the private business or the LGU they serve.[12] Precisely because they serve interests other

A Muslim woman and her family are stopped by a member of the CAFGU at a checkpoint leading into a town on the island of Basilan. Basilan is one of the bases of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). © Lucian Read/Small Arms Survey than those of the state, it is not unlikely that they will engage in activities that are contrary to state policy.[13] More seriously, the establishment of SCAAs effectively provides a legitimizing mechanism for the private armies that were supposed to have been abolished by the 1987 Constitution.

The AFP acknowledges that some CAFGU members have indeed committed human rights abuses but says that the majority of CAFGU members are disciplined soldiers. Cases of SCAAs employed as security personnel of powerful groups are the exception rather than the rule, it adds (Cabides, 2002, p. 28). The 12-week CAFGU basic military training includes extensive courses on human rights and international humanitarian law. Moreover, to enhance the operational effectiveness of the CAFGU, the AFP launched the CAFGU Revitalization Program aimed at improving its military and political counter-insurgency capabilities but with human rights promotion as an indispensable guidepost. By and large, however, assessments made within the military of the contribution of the CAFGUs focus more heavily on their effectiveness in counter-insurgency than on the human rights aspect of their presence.[14]

## The Civilian Volunteer Organization (CVO)

At their most basic, Civilian Volunteer Organizations (CVOs) serve to provide community or local protection. CVO members are commonly known as the *Barangay Tanod* (the Village Watch) and tasked with community-level crime prevention, monitoring, and coordination of the local Peace and Order Council. First organized in 1982 in Claveria, Misamis Oriental Province in the Northern Mindanao region, CVOs are now present across all the provinces of the Philippines and have an estimated 800,000 volunteers. They are supposed to enhance police work at the local level by acting as neighbourhood watch groups and supporting and implementing local peace, order, security, and development projects. They are mandated to provide *unarmed* civilian assistance in the following areas (CCPR, 2002):

- intelligence or information gathering;
- neighbourhood watch or *rondas*;
- medical, traffic, or emergency assistance;

- assistance in the identification and implementation of community development projects; and
- gathering of relevant information and data as inputs to peace and order planning and research activities.

Any group of interested and concerned law-abiding citizens aged 18 years and above can organize a CVO to promote community self-defence and provide protection against criminals and other lawless elements. Many CVOs also perform intelligence and undercover work for local military and police units and so are required to undergo training in basic intelligence, community work, national security, self-defence, use of firearms, civilian arrest, and due process and public information (CCPR, 2002, p. 119). The *Bantay Bayan* (Town Watch) Foundation, Inc. (BBFI) was registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission in 1984 and aims to provide education and training to CVOs. The BBFI reported that it has formed 9,018 chapters nationwide with a total membership of 4.5 million (GRP, 2002, p. 120). This means the BBFI includes members who are not officially registered as members of CVOs, which raises questions about the legality of their members forming part of the security network of local governments.

Although they are supposed to be primarily involved in unarmed peace and order management, CVOs have also been involved in the AFP counterinsurgency operation *Bantay Laya* (Freedom Watch, first implemented in 2002 and relaunched in 2007).[15] They form part of the Integrated Territorial Defense System (ITDS), which aims to secure and insulate the locality from enemy influence, reincursion, or re-entry. The military has also used them as part of the territorial forces that hold 'liberated areas', which means they are expected not only to engage in intelligence-gathering but also to provide security (Asia Watch, 1990, p. 55).

Although CVOs were intended to be an unarmed force, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo issued an authorization to arm CVO members in 'high-security risk' areas in October 2001—in the context of the terrorism threat post-11 September (Camacho, Puzon, and Ortiga, 2005, p. 276).[16] Only selected members would be allowed to carry arms, and these would be given training by the military and the police. Nonetheless, widespread reports of CVOs carrying high-powered arms, including the M1 Garand as well as M14 rifles, indicate that these groups stray from even this more liberal mandate of providing limited armed local security (Camacho, Puzon, and Ortiga, 2005, p. 276). Moreover, the weapons are types usually issued to CAFGU units by the AFP, which indicates that they may have been issued to CVO members by the AFP. In Mindanao, CVO members were reported to have RPG launchers and M79 grenade launchers (Camacho, Puzon, and Ortiga, 2005, p. 276).

There have been reports of participation by CVO members in illegal activities, such as the illicit drug trade and involvement in kidnapping for ransom (Camacho, Puzon, and Ortiga, 2005, pp. 275–76). Some of the most egregious cases of abuse involve CVO members acting as part of the 'private armies' of local politicians, most notably in Mindanao (Bagayaua, 2006, p. 27). CVOs have been dragged into feuds (known locally as '*rido*') between powerful political families in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The rival Ampatuan and Candao families are at the heart of ongoing violence in the ARMM and have frequently involved the MILF, the military, and, by association, the CVOs in their conflict.[17] CVOs in Maguindanao province armed by the PNP and the AFP are said to have participated in attacks against villages sympathetic to the MILF. According to one report, Governor Ampatuan has a force of 300 armed civilian volunteers, which he is accused of using to acquire land in MILF-controlled areas, resulting in violence and the displacement of at least 4,500 families in June 2006 (Bagayaua, 2006, p. 26; Arguillas, 2006, pp. 14–15). Complicating the matter further are personal feuds involving members of CVOs (and CAFGU elements) in Maguindanao and the MILF, which have escalated into full-blown gunfights.

The allegation that the PNP and AFP armed certain CVOs represents a startling violation of the CVOs' mandate, even with the limited authorization given by President Arroyo in the context of counter-terrorism. CVOs have also been accused of involvement in counter-insurgency operations. According to the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates, 300 CVO members were involved in operations conducted by the AFP against the MNLF in Tipo-tipo, Basilan province in 1997, which led to the displacement of 1,700 families (Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates, 1998). Human rights groups have called for the CVOs—as well as CAFGUs—to be disbanded, but President

Arroyo says they play a vital role in the pursuit of peace and development in the countryside (MEDCo, 2003). The question is the extent to which these can be regulated and by whom. If, as in the case of Maguindanao, those who have jurisdiction over the CVOs abuse their authority, it is unclear what control, if any, the national government exercises over these groups.

## Private armies and vigilante groups

In the Philippines, armed groups raised and maintained by private interests are generally referred to as 'private armies' (see Box 8.1). As discussed above, some of these groups are legitimized by their being officially identified as SCAA units or as CVOs, even though they serve private business or specific political interests. But many other independent armed groups have been established *without* official sanction from the state. In 1994 there were 152 of these groups, armed and maintained by business people, politicians, and other interest groups (Riedinger, 1994). The Commission on Elections (COMELEC)—which coordinates regular police operations to disband private armed groups during election periods—identified 154 groups in 2000, 115 in 2004, and 93 in 2007 (*Philippine Daily Inquirer,* 2007a). This suggests that private armed groups that have no official sanction from the government continue to exist, despite COMELEC's efforts and the fact that they were outlawed by the 1987 Constitution.

The accompanying case study on Abra province (Chapter 9) describes how private armies have been set up by politicians to further their political ambitions, thwart potential opponents, and even tighten their hold on the proceeds of crime. Municipal taxes are reportedly used to fund the private armies, which are often better armed than the law-enforcement agencies. According to a report based on an investigation by the Philippine National Police's Task Force Abra and its Criminal Investigation and Detection Group, Abra has ten private armies—referred to as 'partisan armed groups' in the report—with 117 members, most of which are in the service of local politicians (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2007b). The ostensible purpose of these groups is to provide security for politicians who have to operate in a threatening environment. Abra suffers from higher levels of political violence than elsewhere in the Philippines due to the relative weakness of local law enforcement bodies and to the activities of the CPP-NPA (see Chapter 9).

Many private businesses hire private armed security forces to protect their operations against extortion by the CPP-NPA but then use these armed groups to intimidate or even attack their competitors. In Davao Oriental, for example, Governor Corazon Malanyaon issued an order in October 2007 temporarily stopping mining activities in the municipalities of Lupon and Banaybanay because private armies employed by small-scale miners were 'sowing terror among the hapless civilians in these towns' and preventing miners with legal permits from operating (League of Provinces, 2007).

Other armed groups are connected to neither political nor business interests but were created as anti-Communist or anti-insurgency organizations. These include groups initially organized by the military and then unleashed against the CPP-NPA and the MNLF and later against the MILF, most visibly in the mid-1980s. Referred to as vigilante groups by human rights advocates, some of them were originally millennarian religious organizations. In Mindanao alone, the military transformed at least 34 Christian groups into armed groups to help quell Muslim secessionism in the 1970s and 1980s (Kowalewski, 1990, pp. 246–64; Van Der Kroef, 1988, pp. 630–49.) These groups have formed an umbrella organization called the Military Christian Unified Command.

Some of the better-known among these groups in the Philippines are described in the following subsections.

## Alsa Masa (Masses Arise)[18]

Alsa Masa was organized in 1986 in the Agdao area of Davao City as a local anti-Communist organization of former Communist guerrillas, gangsters, and assassins led by Rolanda Cagay. The name was coined when Cagay reportedly shouted 'Alsa Masa' after gunning down an NPA rebel. One version of the group's history traces its origins to a group organized in 1984 by Wilfredo Aquino, an anti-Communist Marcos loyalist, and later merely revived by Cagay. It claimed to have killed at least 104 local Communists in March 1987 alone, which alarmed many human rights organizations and prompted the Presidential Committee on Human Rights to send a fact-finding team to Davao City. The team reported that the Philippine military assisted in the formation of Alsa Masa. Lieut.-Colonel Franco M. Calida was its known military protector and was instrumental in transforming it from its origins as essentially a small street gang (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1988). Alsa Masa rapidly increased its membership, expanding to many *barangays* (villages) in Davao. Former President Corazon Aquino described it as a model of 'People's Power' against insurgency (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1988).

## Alamara and Alsa Lumad

The Alamara is a band of Lumads, an indigenous community that operates mostly in the ancestral homes of the Ata-Manobo ethnic groups in Davao del Norte. Like Alsa Masa, Alamara is a local anti-Communist group allegedly supported by the Philippine military (IDMC, 2006). It is presently headed by Datu Sanggat Logsing and has been given legitimacy through its status as a CVO in Davao del Norte. It is thought to have some 500 members (*Bulatlat*, 2003). Alamara's aggressive anti-insurgency operations have led to forced evacuation and massive displacement of civilians. In May 2003, for example, an Alamara operation led to the exodus of at least 200 members of the Ata-Manobo tribe, including about 70 children (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2003). The human rights group Karapatan accused the group of extrajudicial killings in Bukidnon and of the murder of three people and the displacement of 746 families in Paguibato near Davao City (PCIJ, 2006). The Alamara reportedly patrol the hinterlands with sharp *bolos* (machetes) and M14, M16, and other high-calibre rifles obtained from the AFP (*Bulatlat*, 2003).

Alsa Lumad is a military-backed anti-Communist vigilante group of indigenous people operating mostly in San Fernando, Bukidnon. The exact origin of the group has not been determined, but it is believed to have been created by the Philippine military in 2002. It targets the NPA, which, in turn, has publicly accused Alsa Lumad of banditry, cattle rustling, kidnap-for-ransom, and other criminal activities (*Bulatlat*, 2003). The AFP is reported to be planning to replicate Alsa Lumad in the Lumad villages of Bukidnon, North Cotabato, and Davao del Norte—another measure of its effectiveness in the fight against the NPA. According to Colonel Eduardo del Rosario, former commander of the 73rd Infantry Brigade, the Alsa Lumad aims to drive away the NPA guerrillas and 'neutralize' their mass base (*Bulatlat*, 2001). The range of activities that constitutes 'neutralization' could include abuses of human rights.

## Ilaga Movement (Visayan for 'rats').

Formed in the Cotabato region in 1973, the Ilaga Movement was originally led by Feliciano Luces, alias 'Toothpick', who was known for murdering and mutilating six people in 1970 (Espejo, 2008). The Ilaga became more widely known after one of its leaders, Norberto Manero, was convicted in 1985 on several counts of homicide and attempted murder, including the murder of the Italian priest, Father Tullio Favalli (Espejo, 2008; *Bulatlat*, 2005). Manero served jail for the crime but is now free after he was given parole. A number of local politicians nurtured the Ilaga Movement, despite its notoriety, because of its role in countering Communist insurgency in the 1970s and 1980s. A new group calling itself the Bag-ong Ilaga (the new Ilaga) emerged in 2005 with the stated objective of countering Muslim separatism and terrorism (*Sun Star Davao*, 2005; *Bulatlat*, 2005). Reportedly led by a Commander Dapay, the Ilaga Movement is said to have established a presence in Bukidnon, Lanao del Norte, and Zamboanga del Sur.

## Kuratong Baleleng

Based in Ozamiz City in the province of Misamis Occidental, Kuratong Baleleng was originally a criminal organization led by Octavio 'Ongkoy' Parojinog (Torres, 2003).[19] It acquired 'legitimacy' as a vigilante group when it proclaimed itself to be anti-Communist. The group was allegedly supported by the AFP. According to a 2001 report by the Intelligence Service of the AFP (ISAFP), then Army Major Franco Calanog formally organized the Kuratong Baleleng in 1986 and placed it under the supervision of the Army's 101st Brigade based in Misamis Occidental (Torres, 2003). ISAFP described the group as:

> *very effective as a counter-insurgency organization. But with the decline of the insurgency threat, the Kuratong Baleleng group was officially disbanded in June 1988. Without military supervision, the group rapidly metamorphosed into an organized criminal syndicate. A lot of kidnappings, robberies, smuggling, murders, and extortion were attributed to the group.* (ISAFP, 2001)

ISAFP said the current group is 'one of the many criminal syndicates being controlled and used by powerful individuals for financial, political, and even personal undertakings' (ISAFP, 2001). Investigative journalist Jose Torres reported that:

> *[t]he Kuratong Baleleng eventually splintered into three major groups. The original group of Ongkoy Parojinog based in Ozamiz City and adjacent provinces was believed to have focused on extortion and illegal gambling. Another group led by sons Nato and Aldong operated in Metro Manila and other big cities and specialized in bank and armored car robberies and kidnappings. A third headed by Ongkoy's nephew, Carlito 'Dodo Miklo' Calasan, concentrated on robberies, but would later venture into other illegal activities.* (Torres, 2003)

## Nakasaka (or Nagkahiusang Katawhan Alang sa Kalinaw, United People for Peace)

Based in Davao del Sur, Nakasaka is feared by the population as a brutal anti-Communist death squad. Like Alsa Masa and Ilaga, Nakasaka was used by the government in the anti-insurgency campaign as part of the 'total war' policy of President Aquino, particularly in its Operation *Lambat Bitag* (Net Trap). Its members carried *bolos* (long knives), and other crude weapons during their night watch or patrol duties. Organized by Davao del Sur's Police Provincial Commander Jose Magno and then governor Douglas Cagas, Nakasaka claimed responsibility for causing the surrender of 5,000 members of the NPA and supporters between its establishment in 1986 and its disbandment in the early 1990s. Cagas, once again the governor of Davao del Sur, is seeking its reinstatement to counter what he has described as a resurgent NPA and increasing banditry (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2007c).

## Tadtad (Chop-Chop)

The Tadtad is a collection of Christian groups that became notorious as armed auxiliaries to the AFP in its fights against both the NPA and Muslim secessionist groups. Its preferred weapon is the bolo. One group, formally known as Sagrado Corazon Senor (Lord of the Sacred Heart), is a fanatical cult known for chopping up the bodies of its victims. It gained notoriety in the 1970s when the military used its members in offensives against Muslim secessionist guerrillas. Most of its original members were Christian settlers from the central Philippines, particularly in Samar, Leyte, and Cebu. Its members have claimed that their bodies have the power to repel bullets. Some CAFGU members have joined the group (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2007d).

## Other groups

Other groups have also gained notoriety for using bladed weapons against their enemies. Two such groups are the Putians and the Pulahans, distinguishable from each other by the colour of the cloth they wrap around their bolos, white for the Putian and red for the Pulahan. The Pulahan was organized in the early 1980s as an anti-Communist vigilante organization. Many of its members were known as military informants and former members of the ICHDF. The group was accused of the disappearance of 30 alleged NPA members in the 1980s and 1990s and the murders of suspected Communists during the early years of President Joseph Estrada's administration (1998–2001).[20] The Pulahan group is reported to have recently established its bailiwick in Sultan Kudarat and is reportedly led by Isaac Gustillo (Eur, 2002, p. 5).

### Box 8.1 **Definitions: warlords, private armies, and partisan armed groups**

*Warlord.* Provincial politicians who use private armies to gain and retain power. Although warlords are active throughout the Philippines, they are not found in every province. They include Floro Crisologo in the 1960s in Ilocos Sur; Armando Gustilo in Negros Occidental; Ramon Durano, Sr. in Cebu in the 1960s; Muhamad Ali Dimaporo in Lanao del Sur; and Rafael Lacson in Negros Occidental (McCoy, 2009, p. 14).

*Private/partisan armed groups.* Over the years, the law enforcement arm of the government, the PNP, arrived at the operational definition and parameters of a private army. It also devised the acronym PAG, which used to stand for 'private armed group' and now stands for 'partisan armed group'. Its current definition is an:

> *organized group of more than three persons with legally issued or illegally possessed firearms utilized in the conduct of criminal and/or oppressive acts primarily for the advancement and protection of the vested political and economic interest of a public official or a private individual. This excludes groups whose activities are purely criminal in nature.*[21]

'Private army' is still the more popular and familiar term in the Philippines. Private armies are more commonly assumed to be under the administration of public officials than private individuals. The existence of private armies was one of the justifications used by former President Ferdinand E. Marcos for the declaration of martial law in 1972.

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## Arming auxiliaries and private groups in the Philippines

In a comparative study of South-east Asian societies, the Philippines is described as 'a heavily armed society' with a level of civilian gun ownership close to that of the United States (Capie, 2002, p. 67). According to the PNP, a total of 962,486 firearms were registered by organizations or individuals as of 2005 (PNP, 2006; see Chapter 10). This includes the arsenals of the AFP and the PNP as well as privately owned weapons. As outlined in further detail in Chapter 10, according to PNP data more than half of all the registered firearms in the country are registered in the name of security agencies (some 15 per cent) and other private individuals or organizations. This does not include arms that form part of the government arsenal and are memoranda-receipted to groups or individuals acting as agents of the state, such as the CAFGU, CVOs, and security for local politicians.

PNP data files also indicate that in 2005 there were 321,685 unregistered firearms in the country. This figure includes firearms that were illegally manufactured, illegally purchased, or smuggled into the country, and weapons that were not reregistered, declared lost by their owners, or in the hands of insurgent groups or criminal organizations.[22] Those who support regulated gun ownership in the Philippines argue that the problem of firearms proliferation in the country stems from the inability of the state to regulate properly local production, ownership, and use. The prevalence of unlicensed firearms in criminal activities involving small arms supports this case: statistics made available by the Arms Corporation of the Philippines (ArmsCor) demonstrate that only 10 per cent of all crimes involve firearms, but, of these, 93.7 per cent involve unlicensed firearms (Kraft, 2004, p. 75). Since 2001 there has, however, been a large increase in the number of criminal cases filed in court involving licensed firearms (Kraft, 2004, p. 75). More important, perhaps, is the fact that most cases of human rights violations that implicate armed groups legalized as auxiliaries of the military or acting as agents of the state in some way involve registered firearms. As of March 2006, the Philippine Commission on Human Rights (PCHR) recorded more than 2,700 complaints of human rights violations against non-state agents, including CAFGU and CVOs. Of this total, 89 per cent involved members of the armed auxiliary forces of the state, private armed groups that work with the AFP and the PNP, and private armies. Some 67 per cent of these complaints are thought to have involved firearms that had been supplied by the military (PCHR, 2007).

The permissive attitude towards firearms in the Philippines facilitates a cycle of violence that is fed by the prevailing political conditions, especially the conflicts against Communist and separatist insurgents. The evident lack of trust in the capacity of the state to provide security has become the justification for the large number of private purchases of firearms in the country on the grounds that they increase personal safety. Yet small arms proliferation has been a major factor in the intensification of existing conflicts and the increase in violent crime. The increased incidence of criminal acts involving licensed firearms demonstrates that even legally purchased and legally owned firearms can be used for illegal purposes.[23]

Most of the groups and individuals that act as extensions of state power and authority and are the focus of this chapter are armed from government armouries and munitions stocks. CAFGU units and those members of CVOs that have been allowed to carry firearms are, for the most part, armed by the AFP and the PNP. The Government Arsenal (GA)—a bureau under the Department of Defense responsible for the establishment, operation, maintenance, and security of government arsenals—produces most of the weapons available to these groups, with other contracted local producers manufacturing the remainder. The M16A1 (produced under licence from Colt) is the standard infantry weapon used by the Philippine military, although auxiliaries and groups recruited for counter-insurgency operations generally use older-generation weapons, such as the M1 Garand and M14 rifles and M1 and M2 Carbines. The GA also produced the G3 rifle under licence from Heckler and Koch in the mid-1970s, though its utility has largely diminished since the 1980s (Capie, 2002, pp. 68–72).

The GA produces most of the ammunition requirement of the AFP and the PNP and whatever forces operate in conjunction with them. There are two ammunition product lines, one for rifles (Gatlo) and one for pistols (Gapat-Gabin), which makes possible integrated ammunition production from raw materials of cartridge cases, bullets, primers, and propellant powders. The GA manufactures seven types of ammunition which are produced according to US military standards. These are the 5.56 mm M193, .30 M1, Carbine; .30 M2;

7.62 mm M80; .45 M 1911; .38 Special; and 9 mm Parabellum ammunition. To ensure longer storage life of its products, the GA uses tin can for loose ammunition and metal box for linked ammunition. Private producers have also been contracted to produce limited quantities of weapons for the military and the police. ArmsCor, for example, is producing under licence 10,000 units of the South African 9 mm Vektor SP-1 pistol for the PNP (Capie, 2002, pp. 68–72).

Armed groups that are privately raised and provisioned (that is, they do not have to rely on the AFP or the PNP for weapons) also possess tremendous firepower—and are sometimes better equipped than the PNP (see Chapter 9). An estimate made in 1993 indicated that as many as 70 per cent of the personnel of these groups carry high-powered weapons (Riedinger, 1994). It is not unlikely that the same remains true in more recent times. This demand for firearms in the Philippines is met by both imports and local production. The Philippines is a net importer of firearms, since there is very little surplus production in the country. Interestingly, however, most of the firearms produced in the Philippines are exported. Discussions with arms producers indicate that Filipino gun enthusiasts tend to prefer imported firearms because of the status they convey (Kraft, 2004, p. 80). There is a considerable inflow of arms into the Philippines through legal channels, mainly from the United States, though Europe and South America have also sent considerable volumes of arms to the Philippines over the years. Indicative of the kinds of arms that are in the possession of private groups are those that the PNP has confiscated or captured in the course of its operations against these groups. Aside from the ubiquitous M16 and AK47, these have included MP5 and M15 sub-machine guns, M14s, Belgian FN-FALs (or their copies), and Israeli Galils (or their copies).[24]

Imported firearms on a year-to-year basis contribute only part of the annual number of arms for which licences are issued, while local production accounts for the balance. The most important among local producers is ArmsCor, which has its main plant in Marikina in Metro Manila. It dominates the arms industry in the Philippines, with one estimate giving it at least an 80 per cent share of the country's production, of which at least 70 per cent is exported (Kraft, 2004, pp. 79–81). Its products, aside from a variety of pistols, include less powerful copies of the M16 and AK47 assault rifles and 11 types of bolt-action rifles

(Capie, 2002, p. 71). On the other hand, illegal manufacturers have provided many of the 'loose' (unregistered) firearms which are accessed by both criminal elements and some of the private armed groups across the country. For the most part, the quality of firearms from these producers is exceedingly low, but some have produced copies of military-type weapons that have proven to be of high quality (Capie, 2002, p. 72).

## Conclusion

The proliferation of armed groups in the Philippines outside of the regular military and police—and outside of the category of rebel groups or criminal organizations—was made possible by a number of factors: a historical model of relying on armed auxiliary forces to help regular military units maintain peace and order; a military short of resources and forced to use any means to tackle two long-standing insurgencies; a weak state that has been unable to regulate its citizens and its own agents effectively, which has caused a 'culture of impunity' to emerge; and the wide proliferation of firearms and the culture of gun ownership and use that accompanies it. As a result, Philippine society is heavily armed, with the majority of weapons in the hands of groups that are either agents of the state or hired by the state.

Even though the Philippines is a self-professed formal democracy, armed groups that are privately organized and accountable primarily to private interests have legitimacy because of the assistance they provide to regular military forces. This skews the political power balance in favour of the status quo. Human rights abuses—particularly the killing of opposition members—have become an expected part of the political environment because of the failure of the state to bring those responsible to justice. The state has been unwilling or unable to act against those who support it because it needs their support to survive. It is easy for those who have the resources to do so to create private armies, and there is evidently little to deter members of private armies from breaking the law.

Yet the state is involved in the creation of private armies not only through its omissions. Some agents of the state actively support the creation of private armed groups. This is the case for the AFP which is, no doubt, frustrated over the political conditions that militate against a military victory against the NPA and the Muslim secessionists. The offer of privately raised armed groups to help the war effort is more than welcome when the resources necessary to conduct a successful counter-insurgency are not forthcoming. In this context, human rights abuses committed by these armed groups are the reflection of what the military is willing to overlook—or carry out itself.

This situation to a large extent reflects the state's priorities. The problem of armed auxiliaries, whether part of the military or the police, or privately raised and armed, is fundamentally political, not military. A state whose leaders cling precariously to power will have no qualms about compromising its position on public welfare and security. Thus, they give way to the contingency of accepting private armies and legitimizing them under the cover of national security. Under such conditions, armed groups in the Philippines will continue to prosper.

## Epilogue (December 2008)

Hostilities in August 2008 involving the MILF and the AFP in Central Mindanao following the aborted signing of the GRP-MILF Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) again illustrated the problems engendered when a weak state faces an insurgency. Three MILF base commands were responsible for the initial attacks on Christian communities in three provinces, against which the AFP retaliated with massive military operations (see Chapter 2). This led to an increase in human rights violations involving both regular and auxiliary forces. As the fighting spread, a number of politicians and local groups supported the activation and arming of CVO units as well as the re-establishment of some vigilante groups.

Of particular concern was the reactivation of the dreaded Ilaga vigilante group (described above), now styling itself as the 'Reform Ilaga Movement'. It is not clear what has been 'reformed'; the group's spokesperson says its 'warfare style is not offensive but defensive' and says the group has no plans to pursue the three MILF base commanders, preferring to leave that to the authorities (Maitem and Maulana, 2008).

The MILF suspects the military of 'recreating' the vigilante group, since it 'could not exist without the blessings of the Philippine armed forces' (Maitem, 2008). This claim has been rebutted by Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro, Jr., who expressed alarm at the resurgence of such groups and stated that parallel attacks by the Ilaga on the MILF while the military pursues the three MILF base commanders would not 'help solve the situation' (Alave, Uy, and Papa, 2008). Former PNP Director General Avelino Razon, Jr. favours a more pragmatic approach, which is for the Ilaga to 'constitute themselves as members of the police auxiliary units under control of the PNP', since as part of the regular state forces they would at least be easier to control (Alave, Uy, and Papa, 2008).

The Arroyo administration has failed to take decisive action against vigilante groups. It warned group leaders against engaging in independent action and escalating the conflict. At the same time, it could not prevent local politicians and personalities from arming CVOs and involving them in combat operations even before the arrival of regular AFP units (AI, 2008). Local leaders and politicians say they provided resources and encouraged their people to take up arms to defend themselves only because the AFP was slow to respond.

The arming of civilians has fed the cycle of violence. The MILF justified some of its actions following the initial attacks by arguing that it was targeting armed CVOs, not civilians. As Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia Pacific Director, pointed out:

> *MILF units that targeted villages have engaged in serious violations of international law and should be held to account. But experience from around the world shows that the deployment of civilian militias can set off a chain of reprisals and only increases the danger facing civilians. All sides to this conflict should step back from the brink and demonstrate their commitment to avoid harming civilians. The MILF must control its forces, and the Philippine government should take responsibility for the security of all peoples in the Philippines, regardless of religion or ethnicity.* (AI, 2008)

It remains to be seen whether this is something that the Philippine government can muster the will to achieve. The current political environment in the country does not provide grounds for optimism. ■

# Endnotes

1 For information on CVOs see Camacho, Puzon, and Ortiga (2005), which cites the Department of the Interior and Local Government. For information on CAFGU membership see CCPR (2002). The figure for CAFGU membership is accurate as of 2007; see, for example, Senate press release 'Recto bats for bigger pay for CAFGUs', 26 April 2007 at <http://www.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2007/0426_recto1.asp>.

2 On 9 August 2009 a shipment of 50 high-powered firearms was seized by Customs agents off the province of Bataan. Initial reports indicated that these were Galil rifles although there are indications that these are FN assault rifles produced under licence in Indonesia. According to Customs intelligence chief Fernandino Tuason, the botched attempt to smuggle the guns could be related to the 2010 elections, although he did not rule out terrorist groups attempting to destabilize the government (*Inquirer.net*, 2009).

3 During the interviews conducted by the Melo Commission, Major General Jovito Palparan (now retired) confirmed a number of statements he had made about collateral damage, civilians killed or wounded in crossfire, and vigilante action against Communists. While he repeatedly said he did not condone anyone in the military acting in this way, the report indicated that he had a cavalier attitude towards the cases of political activists being killed by unknown gunmen in his area of jurisdiction and that he had offered 'encouragement' and 'inspiration' to those who may have been responsible for the killings. See Palparan inquest in the Melo Report (2007).

4 See 'Razon inquest' in the Melo Report (2007). The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) ranks the Philippines high on its list of most dangerous places for media personnel due to the culture of impunity that persists in the killing of journalists. It notes that the number of solved cases and actual convictions of journalists' killers in the Philippines remains extremely low. See Khan (2007).

5 The Chair of the Philippine Commission on Human Rights, Purificacion Quisumbing, has criticized the Arroyo administration's indifference to the killings, disappearances, and harassment that are taking place in the name of counter-insurgency, and says its attitude has fostered a culture of impunity. See Fonbuena (2006) and also Simbulan (2006, pp. 15–16).

6 See Presidential Decree No. 1016 September 22, 1976: Providing for the Creation of the Integrated Civilian Home Defense Forces, <http://www.lawphil.net/statutes/presdecs/pd1976/pd_1016_1976.html>.

7 The level of training and discipline also varies among regular forces. The author's informal discussions with military officers and observers of the military confirm general perceptions of differences in levels of training and discipline between the Philippine Marines and the Army's Special Forces on the one hand and regular AFP units on the other.

8 Article II, Section 4 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution states: 'The prime duty of the Government is to serve and protect the people. The Government may call upon the people to defend the State and, in the fulfillment thereof, all citizens may be required, under conditions provided by law, to render personal, military or civil service.'

9 US dollar rates at 1 December 2005.

10 Article XVIII, Section 24 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution states: 'Private armies and other armed groups not recognized by duly constituted authority shall be dismantled. All para-

military forces including Civilian Home Defense Forces not consistent with the citizen armed force established in this Constitution, shall be dissolved or, where appropriate, converted into the regular force.'

11 These are suspicions that have historical antecedents in the ICHDF period. For this reason, civil society groups insisted that CAAs and SCAAs be directly placed under AFP command and supervision. See Arcala Hall (2006, p. 5).

12 According to one early report, members of the SCAA are paid as much as twice as much as those in the regular CAA because of bonuses and subsidies provided by the private business or LGU they are with. See PHRIC (1993).

13 In Mindanao, SCAAs have provoked skirmishes between the military and the MILF as a result of personal feuds between members of the SCAAs and the MILF. See Gemma B. Bagayaua, 'It's all about power,' *Newsbreak* (28 February 2005), p. 27.

14 An unpublished Master's thesis at the National Defense College of the Philippines looking into the effectiveness of the AFP's administration of CAAs hardly mentions human rights violations (Pal, 1999).

15 This was emphasized by Police Superintendent Ildebrandi Usana of the Directorate for Police Community Relations during a forum entitled 'Peace Policy Dialogue: Peacekeeping Initiatives in the Philippines' held on 14–15 September 2005.

16 As Camacho, Puzon, and Ortiga (2005, p. 276) point out, the government authorized the arming only of qualified barangay tanods, but these may include CVOs. The LGUs would provide the firearms.

17 Maguindanao Governor Andal Ampatuan is a supporter of President Arroyo, while Zacaria Candao (the former governor of the province) has been accused of being sympathetic to the MILF (Bagayaua, 2006, p. 26).

18 For more details see Guyot (1988).

19 'Baleleng' is the name of a 'Muslim maiden' known for her use of a small bamboo (*Kuratong*) in a Visayan mythical tale.

20 Information provided by Mr Rommel Banlaoi, Chairman of the Board and the Executive Director of the Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research (PIPVTR).

21 PNP Regional Intelligence and Investigation Division, Memorandum dated 10 January 2007.

22 This is considered to be a low estimate. The Philippine Action Network on Small Arms (PhilANSA) reported at a briefing at the Linden Suites in Pasig on 17 April 2007 that the number could be at least 1.2 million 'loose' firearms in the country.

23 It is worth noting that, although the emphasis on proliferation seems to fall on unlicensed and unregistered firearms, the line between licit and illicit use does not make a fine distinction between registered and unregistered firearms. The separation between registered and unregistered firearms is really a question of information available to the police in responding to violent crime. Registered firearms are all of those arms that have been produced in or exported to the Philippines legally and therefore have been recorded in the Philippine National Police's national registry. Unregistered firearms are those that have been illegally manufactured in the Philippines and those that have been smuggled into the country. Technically, all unregistered firearms are 'loose', but loose firearms also include those whose licences have expired and not been renewed. This latter issue is principally a question of the legality of

owning a weapon. While the Constitution can be interpreted as supporting the right of citizens to own firearms, this is really more of a privilege, and gun-owners can legally claim ownership only if they have a licence for the firearm they own (one licence per firearm). Licence to own, however, is not a licence to carry a firearm, for which a different permit is required.

24 Different varieties of high-powered firearms have been captured or confiscated by different Philippine agencies in contexts ranging from anti-smuggling operations to the dismantling of private armies. See De Jesus and Pascua (2007) and *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (2009).

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# CHAPTER 9

# Where Guns Rule: Private Armies in Abra (Case Study)

### Artha Kira R. Paredes

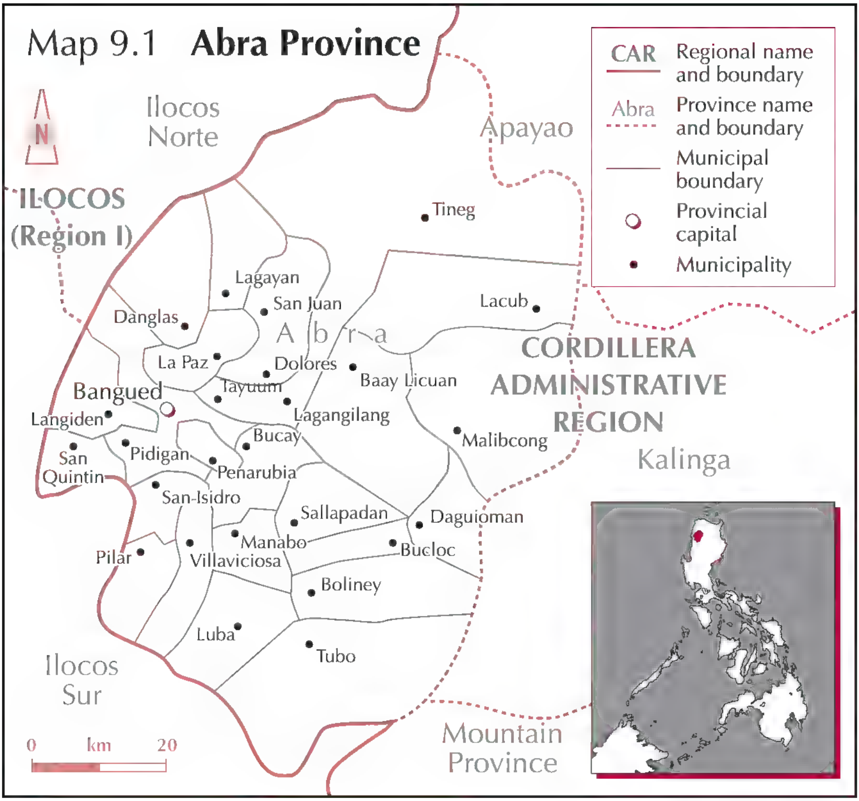
## Introduction

Several similarities connect the murders of Luis Bersamin Jr., James Bersamin, and Marc Ysrael Bernos: all were Abra politicians, their brutal assassinations all took place in 2006, and the suspects behind their deaths were members of private—also known as partisan—armed groups. Posters, banners, and whispering on the streets of Bangued town alluded to the same person behind the killings, namely, Vicente Valera, governor of Abra during 1988–98 and 2001–07.

Bernos, aged 31, who was planning to run for governor in the 2004 national polls, was shot in the head while watching basketball during his town's fiesta celebration in Poblacion, La Paz, on 13 January. Speaking after Bernos's murder, 62-year-old Luis Bersamin Jr., Abra's representative in Congress, said he feared for his life, as did local government chief executives and mayors. He was killed by two motorcyclists in front of the church in Quezon City where his niece had just got married, on 16 December. Provincial board member James Bersamin, 56, was killed in a similar shooting while jogging early in the morning at the Bangued town plaza on 11 November.

Luis Bersamin Jr. and Bernos are thought by their families to have been killed because they planned to run against Valera in the mid-term elections on 14 May 2007 (see, for example, Felipe, 2006). Such speculation was reinforced by a classified report by the Philippine National Police (PNP) which said followers of the then governor and his ally, Tineg Mayor Edwin Crisologo, comprise two-thirds of the ten private armies identified in Abra. The report listed 117 individual members of private armies (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2007).

The three suspected political killings are not unusual in the province. From 2001 to 2007, a further 19 Abra politicians and 13 *barangay kagawad* (village



Map 9.1 **Abra Province**

N
Ilocos Norte
ILOCOS (Region I)
Apayao
CAR Regional name and boundary
Abra Province name and boundary
Municipal boundary
Provincial capital
Municipality
Tineg
Lagayan
San Juan
Danglas
Lacub
A b r a
La Paz
Dolores
CORDILLERA ADMINISTRATIVE REGION
Baay Licuan
Bangued
Tayuum
Langiden
Lagangilang
Bucay
Malibcong
San Quintin
Pidigan
Peñarubia
Kalinga
San-Isidro
Sallapadan
Daguioman
Manabo
Pilar
Villaviciosa
Bucloc
Boliney
Luba
Tubo
Ilocos Sur
0 km 20
Mountain Province

councilors) were killed (see Tables 9.1 and 9.2). They include Mayor Jose Segundo of Tubo (in 2001) and Mayor Clarence Benwaren of Tineg (in 2002).

Political killings in Abra continue despite the creation of a first police Task Force Abra in 2004 and a second after Bersamin's death and ahead of the 2007 elections. The Task Force is made up of the elite Special Action Forces and is aimed at neutralizing armed groups and curbing crime in the province. Task Force members were the only armed men allowed to be seen around local chief executives; the security details assigned to the mayors were withdrawn, and all permits to carry firearms in Abra were cancelled (Ilagan and Palangchao, 2004). The Special Action Forces were meant to stay for three months until Christmas 2004, but at this writing remain to date. They were protecting Bernos when he was assassinated.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in a statement on 17 December 2006 condemned Bersamin's killing and ordered the PNP to 'bring the perpetrators, mastermind and all to justice' (Office of the President, 2006). Despite these efforts, the killings continue, as the following tables show.

### Table 9.1

### Murdered Abra politicians, 2001–April 2007

| Name | Position | Year of death |
|---|---|---|
| Jose Segundo Sr. | Tubo mayor | 2001 |
| Arnulfo Bañez | Pilar Association of Barangay Captain (ABC) president | 2001 |
| Leonardo Parado Sr. | Lagayan councillor | 2001 |
| Charito Tolentino | Barangay captain (ABC president) Langiden | 2001 |
| Clarence Benwaren | Tineg mayor | 2002 |
| Reynaldo Bataller and Restituto Benosa | Barangay captains in Peñarrubia | 2002 (during the Arya Abra festival parade) |
| Zaldimar Blue | Barangay captain in Langiden | 2002 |
| Nestor 'Angin' Belisario Jr. | Barangay captain in Bangued | 2003 |
| Irineo Belisario | To take oath as barangay captain in Lagangilang | 2003 |
| Ceferino Callibag | Candidate for councilor in Danglas | 2004 |
| Amor Bringas | Former barangay captain in Bangued | 2004 |
| Ruben Afos | La Paz ABC president | 2004 |
| Diosdado Claveria | Barangay captain in San Isidro | 2005 |
| Restituto Ballestra | Barangay captain in Bucay | 2005 |
| Marc Ysrael Bernos | La Paz Mayor | 2006 |
| Malvin Dela Peña | Villaviciosa councilor | 2006 |
| James Bersamin | #1 provincial board member in the 2004 elections | 2006 |
| Luis Bersamin Jr. | Congressman, lone district of Abra | 2006 |
| Eddie Tadeo | Barangay captain in Bucay | 2007 |
| Romero Guyang | Barangay captain Lagayan (ABC President) | 2007 |
| Alex Llaneza | Barangay councilor in Lagangilang | 2007 |

**Sources:** 2001–06: PCIJ (2007a); Eddie Tadeo: Galvez (2007); Romero Guyang: OFW Journalism Consortium (2009); Alex Llaneza: Alberto (2007)

Table 9.2

**Murdered Barangay Kagawads (barangay councillors)**

| Name | Barangay | Year of death |
|---|---|---|
| Rogelio Seguerra | Brgy. Pang-ot, Lagayan | 2001 |
| Gregorio Beroña | Brgy. Lumabang, San Juan | 2002 |
| Nestor Batino | Brgy. Buli, La Paz | 2002 |
| Bernardo Damasen | Brgy. Barit, Luba | 2002 |
| Irenio Belisario | Brgy. Cayapa, Lagangilang | 2003 |
| Justino Ballestra | Brgy Patoc, Bucay | 2003 |
| Jerry Belarmino | Brgy. Macarcarmay, Bangued | 2004 |
| Pricilo Billedo | Brgy. Dumayco, Peñarrubia | 2004 |
| Felipe Taeza | Brgy. Bangbangar, Bucay | 2004 |
| Rashid Timbreza | Brgy. Salucag, Dolores | 2004 |
| Roger Babida | Brgy. South Poblacion, Bucay | 2004 |
| Nestor Adame | Brgy. Calaba, Bangued | 2005 |
| Norman Patricio | Brgy. Tattawa, Peñarrubia | 2006 |

**Source:** PCIJ (2007a)

Table 9.3

**Accomplishments of the implementation of the COMELEC gun ban by Task Force Abra**

| Indicator | Incidence |
|---|---|
| Operations conducted | 13 |
| Confiscated firearms | 17 (mainly GA12, .45, . 28, . 22, though M16, AK47, and M14 also feature) |
| Arrested suspects | 21 |
| Cases filed | 12 |

**Source:** Police Regional Office of the Cordillera Administrative Region

## Political landscape

Abra is probably the only province in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) where the NPA, the CPLA, and private army members coexist. The NPA and the CPLA would object to being called private armed groups, but the public seems to see no distinction among them, especially since two mayors who are former NPA members—Malibcong Mayor Mario Baawa and Lacub Mayor Cesario Baroña—are still linked with the rebel groups, while two others—Bucloc Mayor Mailed Molina and Manabo Mayor Masayo Domasing—command their own CPLA following (see Chapter 17).

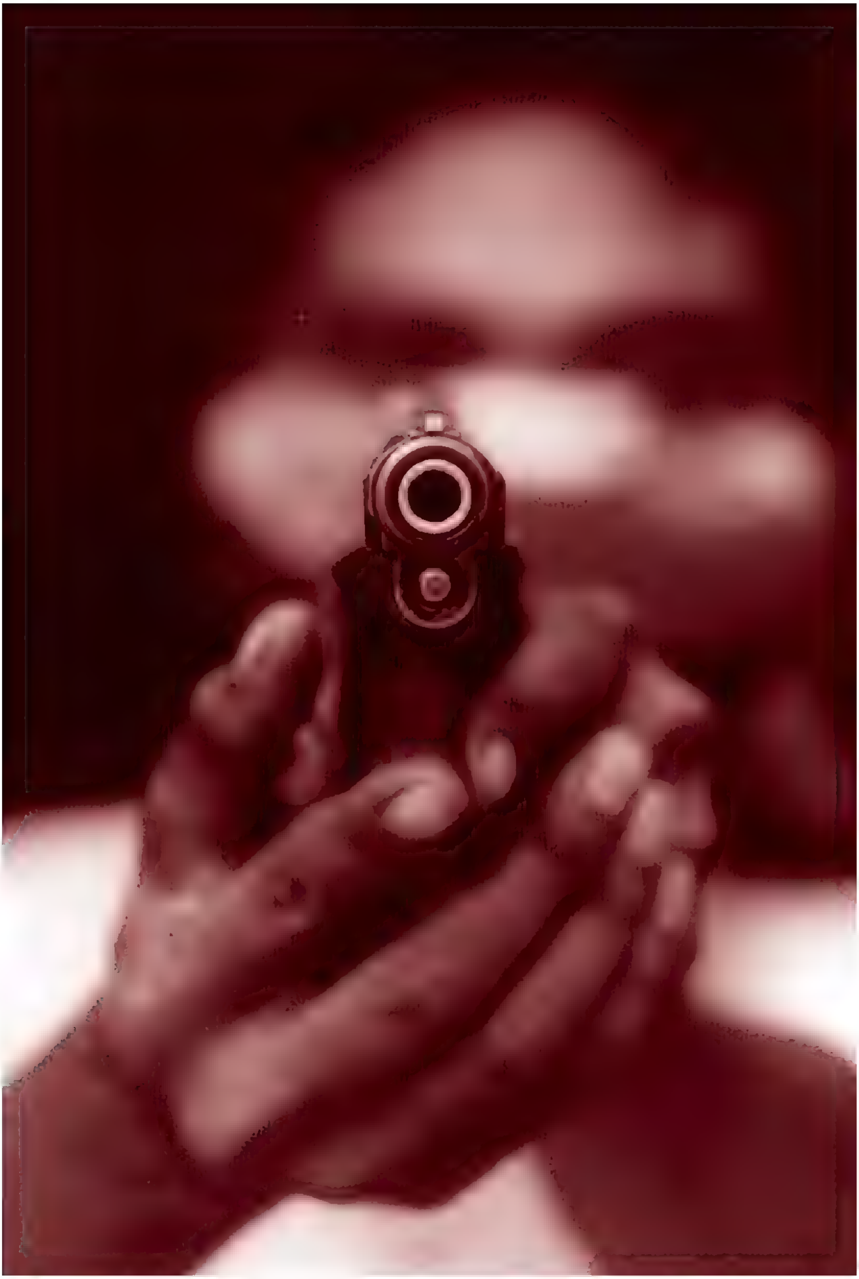
Types of political violence in Abra range from murder of candidates or shooting at their houses, to heated, sometimes drunken, discussions among supporters which can turn violent. Police Chief Inspector Patrick Joseph Allan of the provincial police office Camp Juan Villamor says Abra is the only province where barangay captains and ordinary citizens request police escorts; elsewhere only high-ranking politicians ask for bodyguards (Paredes, 2004a).

Abra has a single congressional district and two provincial board districts. The landlocked province has 27 municipalities and 303 barangays. It has a total population of 209,146, of whom 133,194 are registered voters.[1] The two major ethno-linguistic groups in the area are the Ilocanos, who live mainly in the lowlands (*inlaod*), and the Tingguians, who are centred in the highlands (*adasen*). Bangued—referred to as the province's 'killing fields' because it is where most of the violent incidents take place—has the highest number of voters, 22,212 in 2004, which is double the voting population of other municipalities.[2]

Although police officials have always been reluctant to admit that there are still private armies in the province, let alone reveal the number of them, it is a common assumption among locals that the majority of politicians, from barangay captains to mayors, have private armies. According to Diego Wadagan, spokesperson of the NPA Agustin Begnalen Command, only a handful of Abra politicians do not command private armies; he claims warlordism has existed in Abra since the 1950s and is both pervasive and persistent (Wadagan, 2004).

Older residents of the province date the existence of private armies in Abra to the 1963 gubernatorial election contest between incumbent Jose Valera and challenger Carmelo Barbero. Valera came from one of two Abra political dynasties and was related by marriage to the other, the Paredes clan. Barbero, a retired army colonel from a working-class background, served as Defence Undersecretary during the Marcos regime.

Many supporters of the two candidates were killed by private armies made up of imported former convicts from Manila and hit men called *saka-saka*



A hired assassin who died 18 months after this picture was taken. He was killed by a 'goon' (hired gun) from a rival politician's private army. © E V Espiritu (barefoot) from the neighbouring province of Ilocos Sur (Paredes, 2004a). While there were claims that it was Barbero's more aggressive use of his private army that enabled him to overthrow his opponent, counter-claims suggest that the people were tired of the Valera–Paredes style of politics and governance. The local government election of 1965—contested by these two families—was similarly marred by violence (Tutay, 1965).

Former governor Vicente Valera claims that warlordism was discontinued when he first took office.[3] 'It was only during [the 2004] election that we have experienced this kind of style of a campaigning, style of maintaining again private armies just so one would win an election', he said.

## The members of private armed groups

Police do not have a current estimate of the numbers and strength of private armed groups or the number of unregistered firearms in circulation in the province, and have been reluctant to name individual members. During his term as provincial director of police and deputy of Task Force Abra (September 2004–April 2005), Senior Superintendent Rodolfo Ebardo said 280 was a conservative estimate of 'loose' (unlicensed)[4] firearms in the province and that seven private armed groups were being monitored (Paredes, 2004e).

Teenagers are sometimes employed in private armies, where they start out as babysitters and drivers before learning to dismantle and assemble firearms, and then to kill political opponents.[5] One warlord scion of a political family admitted to training 'goons' as young as 12 (Paredes, 2004b). Since teenagers do not have families to feed, they are cheaper for the private armed group to maintain. Warlords provide food for their armed members and sometimes pay for hospital care and higher education.

According to the NPA:

> *The dominant group is that of Governor Vicente Valera, commanding authority over, and enjoying the allegiance of some 17 municipal mayors. Although outnumbered and currently occupying lower levels of bureaucratic authority, the Bernos- [Bucloc Mayor Mailed] Molina- [Lagayan Mayor Cecilia] Luna triumvirate is supported by out-of-power yet still powerful families . . .* (Wadagan, 2004)[6]

Both Valera and the late Bernos have denied maintaining private armies, though each accuses the other of doing so. Valera says his rivals enjoy the support and the protection of some PNP officials, while Bernos accused Valera of wielding influence over the military and the media (Paredes, 2004d).

## Taxes help fund armed groups

When Valera was asked how private armies generated funds for their activities, he said, 'I can only surmise that they get their funds from the coffers of the government.'[7]

The internal revenue allotment (IRA) is the sole source of municipal income of at least 26 municipalities whose local revenue from taxes is less than PHP

Table 9.4

**Partisan armed groups in Abra**

| Area of operations | Name of groups | Armaments | Source of firearms |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Malibcong, Abra | Baawa Group | 3 x M16<br>1 x M203<br>4 x M14<br>2 x.30 Garand<br>1 x carbine<br>1 x GA 12 shotgun | unknown |
| 2. Tineg, Abra | Crisologo Group | 2 x M14 rifle<br>3 x M16 rifle<br>1 x M2 carbine<br>1 x BAR<br>others FAs are with the CTs | unknown |
| 3. Penarubia, Abra | Domes-ag Group | 2 x .45 pistol<br>1 x 9 mm<br>2 x AK47 | unknown |
| 4. Tayum, Abra | Elvena Group | Undetermined | unknown |
| 5. San Juan, Abra | Taverner Group | 3 .45 pistol<br>2 x M16 rifle | unknown |
| 7. Abra | Valera Group. Gov Vicente 'Vicsyd' Valera and Mayor Zita Valera | 7 x M16<br>2 x M14<br>1 x .30 carbine<br>5 x .45 | unknown |

**Source:** Police Regional Office of the Cordillera Administrative Region

1 million (USD 22,000) a year.[8] The highest IRA is that of Tineg, a municipality where special elections have to be called because its potholed roads are impassable. It receives PHP 50,707,226 (USD 1.1 million) a year. The lowest allocation is to Bucloc with an annual allotment of PHP 15,365,247 (USD 335,000). Provincial business hub Bangued is the only municipality to generate more from local taxes than its IRA allocation.[9]

NPA spokesperson Wadagan estimates that PHP 1.2 million (USD 26,300) is spent monthly across the province paying hired thugs, while a minimum of PHP 5.3 million (USD 116,000) is spent on arms (Wadagan, 2004). When a politician is elected into office, there is an unspoken belief among residents that the IRA is used for the maintenance of a private army and not for the improvement of their respective barangays or municipalities. Police intelligence chief Allan said '[i]f you go to several towns, you will notice that there have been no improvements in their roads and other infrastructures for the past years. This is because the money is used to buy high-powered guns' (Paredes, 2004a).

## Links between private armed groups and the Philippine security forces

At least three warlords, when interviewed, intimated that they were receiving support from top military and police officials for their groups' operations. They said friends in 'high places' supported them by donating firearms, bullets, and other gadgets. They also said their armies have modern assault weapons and high-powered firearms and gadgets such as various types of night vision goggles that the local police and military do not have (Paredes, 2004c).

One warlord admitted carrying out 'military assignments' or offering the services of his private army to other politicians in other provinces for between PHP 25,000 and PHP 100,000 (USD 550–2,200) depending on the nature of the 'assignment' (Paredes, 2004b). One of the findings of former Cordillera police director Chief Superintendent Jesus A. Verzosa's memorandum on the Abra situation is that police and army personnel served as bodyguards for politicians (Verzosa, 2005).

Police are reportedly often intimidated by members of private armed groups, not only because they are better armed, but because they are assumed to be under the wing of their superiors. 'Once they do their job in checking these [alleged members of private armed groups], they are either transferred outside of the province or made to explain their actions. Sometimes cases would even be filed against them', former governor Valera said.[10]

Allegations have also been made of direct collusion between private armies and sections of the military in political assassinations. On 8 March 2005 a charge of attempted murder was filed against Valera and former Philippine Army 41st infantry battalion commander Lieut.-Colonel Noel Mislang by opposition Mayor Luna. Valera and Mislang were also charged with the murder of Private Antonio Rosqueta and the attempted murder of his colleague Eduardo Bersalona, for reportedly refusing to carry out their mission to liquidate Luna and her family. Valera vigorously denies any involvement in the cases (Ilagan, 2005). Mislang was relieved from his post on 12 January 2005 and held at the 5th Infantry Division Headquarters in Gamu, Isabela.

Verzosa recommended that the entire 41st infantry battalion be transferred or removed, citing the Luna case as one of the reasons. To date, the same unit is deployed in the province under the leadership of Lieut.-Colonel Raul Bautista.

## Rule of the gun

Verzosa's 2005 report on Abra was the basis of many decisions by the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) on how to free Abra from the clutches of its warlords and their private armies.

The report enumerated, as some of the factors that have engendered a culture of warlordism, political patronage directed to the governor, the partiality of the judiciary and the prosecution, and the use of inmates at the provincial jail as the governor's henchmen. According to the report, the governor used the military as his private army. It also said that some mayors, particularly rebel returnees, supported the NPA. Verzosa said the civilian population was afraid to speak up for fear of retaliation because 'the rule of law is overpowered by the rule of the gun' (Verzosa, 2005).

Goons are better-armed than police officers, who are unlikely to have ever even held as high a calibre assault weapon as the one issued to this private army hand. © E V Espiritu

Not surprisingly, both former governor Valera and the NPA criticized the report. Valera admitted that the activities of armed groups instilled fear among members of the courts, the prosecutor's office, and even the clergy, but denied involvement in political violence in the province. The NPA's Wadagan criticized the report's failure to mention private armies linked to the CPLA and the Bernos family clan. He also dismissed allegations that the NPA is supported by Abra politicians (Wadagan, 2005).

A fact-finding team headed by then National Police Commission (Napolcom) Commissioner Miguel Coronel was formed in March 2005 to verify Verzosa's report. It recommended that members of local police forces under the control of the governor and the 27 mayors be withdrawn or suspended on the grounds that they 'abused authority', 'provided material support to criminal elements', 'engaged in acts inimical to national security or which negates the peace and order campaign', and were 'derelict in the performance of mandated functions as Napolcom [National Police Commission] deputy' (Coronel et al., 2005). Almost all of the mayors were also charged with 'frequent unauthorized absences' (Coronel et al., 2005). The team also recommended the preventive suspensions of then Governor Valera and Mayor Edwin Crisologo on the basis that they abused authority, committed offences punishable by prison, and were guilty of misconduct in office and dereliction of duty.

With regard to the Abra police, the fact-finding team recommended a sustained campaign against unlicensed firearms; the relief of police chiefs who had served for more than six months; a retraining–orientation–indoctrination course for the entire rank and file of the Abra Provincial Police Office; and the maintenance of the Special Armed Forces contingent as the main force in the province.

DILG Secretary Angelo Reyes went far beyond the findings and recommendations of Coronel's team, however, transferring the entire Abra police force to far-flung police precincts. He justified the transfers on the ground that the officers had failed to disband the private armies in the province. Local government officials were also stripped of their supervisory control over the local police force (Antiporda and Vargas, 2005). The officers were scattered throughout the Cordillera and replaced by officers from other provinces who were not familiar with the Abra political culture, peace and order situation, and terrain. The new police officers were less successful at recruiting witnesses and filing cases in court: the level of cases filed in court fell from 78.35 per cent in 2004 to 75.30 per cent in 2005 (Pumecha, 2007).

## Conclusion

Over the past few decades the command of private armies has become one of the most important influences on the lives of Abra politicians. The existence of private armies is facilitated by easy access to powerful small arms and a culture that is very tolerant of the sight of such firearms. Many unlicensed small arms are in circulation in the province, and are easily accessible to members of private armies.

Contributing to the prevalence of private armies in the province is a lack of job opportunities and education, and the sense among constituents that the current local political system is unfair. The judicial system is difficult for the powerless and poor to navigate, which makes convictions unlikely for criminals connected with warlords. The perception among low-ranking police is that warlords hold sway over their superiors and other high-ranking government officials. Some police officers are themselves thought to work alongside private army members in the service of warlords.

The phenomenon of warlordism is unlikely to be tackled without the concerted efforts of all sectors of society, including civil society organizations, the church, police, and politicians. Political will is needed to address the apparent moral and spiritual bankruptcy that underlies the problem. Efforts to tackle the problem should include the rehabilitation of members of private armies, especially minors, and capacity building of local public officials in participatory and good governance.

The national government is right to be concerned, but its involvement to date has yielded few positive results. It has a role to play in monitoring the situation on the ground, and, more importantly, should ensure that government services—including development and livelihood programmes—extend to all parts of the province. It could also consider providing a special prosecutor for private army-related cases and additional police to help facilitate peace in the short term. ■

## Endnotes

1 Population figures are for 2000, from the National Statistics Office. The figures for registered voters are for 2004 and are compiled by Comelec, 'Election Statistics: Number of Registered Voters and Established/Clustered Precincts, May 10, 2004 National and Local Elections, as of 28 April 2004: Cordillera Administrative Region,' <http://www.comelec.gov.ph/statistics/2004natl_local/car.html>.

2 Bucay had 9,967 registered voters in 2004, while all other municipalities had fewer than 9,000, according to Comelec figures.

3 Interview with Vicente P. Valera, Abra Governor, Abra Provincial Capital, July 2004 (hereafter 'Valera interview').

4 For a definition of 'loose' firearms, see Chapter 11.

5 GMA 7's 'Reporter's Notebook', documentary broadcast on 21 June 2005.

6 Molina is better known as the head of the CPLA than an opponent of Valera.

7 Valera interview.

8 IRA comes from the national government and is the municipality's 'share in the national internal revenue taxes' as defined by the Local Government Code of 1991.

9 Figures for financial year 2007, produced by the Department for Budget and Management, <http://www.dbm.gov.ph/issuance/>. USD conversions are for 5 January 2007, on which the date the DBM figures were issued.

10 Valera interview.

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## CHAPTER 10

# Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Philippines: Possession, Demand, Supply, and Regulation (Overview)

### Raymund Jose G. Quilop[1]

## Introduction

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is a serious problem globally, regionally, and nationally. According to Pasi Patokallio, Chairman of the UN Second Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, 'small arms are today's real weapons of mass destruction' as they are 'misused to kill tens of thousands of people every year in conflicts in many parts of the world' (Patokallio, 2005, p. 1). It has also been noted that 'small arms kill an estimated half a million people every year; that's one person every minute of every day and night of every year' (Inoguchi, 2005, p. 1). Daily monitoring by the International Institute of Security Studies of conflict deaths in eight conflicts in Asia, Africa, South America, and the Caucasus from June to October 2004 showed that small arms are responsible for 60–90 per cent of direct conflict deaths and that they play an analogous role in causing indirect conflict deaths (Small Arms Survey, 2005, pp. 248–49, 258).

Intra-state conflicts in many South-east Asian countries help explain the proliferation of small arms in this particular region (Kramer, 2001, pp. 41–48). The Philippines is no exception, as the chapters in this volume on Communist and Muslim armed groups illustrate. But the problem of small arms in the Philippines is not confined to recognized armed groups: guns are also used by criminal gangs and by ordinary citizens whose disputes often escalate into violence when guns are easily available.

Drawing on various sources, including government reports, formal and informal discussions with government officials, official statistics, estimates on gun holdings by NGOs, and academic analyses, this chapter begins with a brief overview of current international efforts to curb small arms proliferation, which to date have had little influence over small arms control in the Philippines. It then investigates who is acquiring small arms in the Philippines and for what purpose, and presents details on the arms holdings of security forces, civilians, and non-state armed groups.

The chapter also analyses the supply side of the small arms problem: in particular, smuggling and foreign supplies, diversions from legal stockpiles, and the local manufacture of firearms. Finally, it addresses the government's attempts to stem the dissemination of small arms. It demonstrates that these efforts have been relatively ineffective, despite the existence of legal and institutional infrastructures for preventing and controlling the spread of small arms in the Philippines. Licensing is a particular weak spot in the regulatory framework.

Among the chapter's key findings are the following:

- Some 45 per cent of registered firearms are held by the armed agencies of the national government, of which 35 per cent, or 339,033 firearms, are held by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP).
- Approximately 15 per cent of the total number of registered firearms, some 143,000 weapons, are in the hands of private security guards. Non-state armed groups hold 14,878 firearms, according to official figures. There are no specific laws prohibiting and penalizing the transfer of firearms to non-state actors.
- The PNP estimates that 321,685 'loose' firearms were in circulation in 2005 (PCTC, 2006). The Small Arms Survey estimated in 2002 that the number is nearer 4.2 million, more than ten times official figures (Small Arms Survey, 2002, p. 98–99).
- Around 93 per cent of all gun-related crimes recorded from 1993 to April 2006 in the Philippines involve unlicensed guns (PCTC, 2006).

## A brief overview of international efforts to curb small arms

Interest in the subject of small arms proliferation may be attributed to the decline of the threat of global conflict after the end of the cold war. While armed conflict involving pitched battles between large armies using conventional weapons, such as tanks, ships, and bombers, is still a reality, the end of the cold war allowed other issues, such as intra-state conflicts and small arms proliferation, to gain attention. Given their portability, small arms and light weapons have become the 'preferred weapons for many groups involved in small scale conflicts including the armed forces of poor countries' (Sukma, 2004, p. 3). They are 'widely available and easily accessible, relatively cheap and durable, simple to use yet extremely lethal, easy to conceal and have legitimate military, police and civilian uses' (Kraft, 2004, p. 71).

The international community was slow to turn its attention to the issue. The first UN report on small arms dates from 1995 (Rana, 1995). The first UN Panel of Experts Report was issued in 1997 (UNGA, 1997), though it was not until 2001 that the United Nations held its landmark Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. The conference resulted in a Programme of Action containing a set of measures to control violence emanating from the diffusion of small arms and light weapons. Subsequent review conferences have been held to 'review progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action', but few substantive advances have been made towards effective Programme implementation and the strengthening of the UN's existing normative framework for small arms (UNGA, 2001, para. IV.1.a; Small Arms Survey, 2007, pp. 118–19).

Other players are getting involved in the development of worldwide small arms norms. In June 2006, 42 states and 17 international organizations and NGOs adopted *The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development*, which commits them to 'tak[e] action to reduce armed violence and its negative impact on socio-economic and human development' (Geneva Declaration, 2006). That same year, the Control Arms Campaign, Amnesty International, Oxfam International, and the International Action Network on Small Arms presented former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan with a petition by one million people from some 160 countries calling for 'tough global controls on the arms trade and an Arms Trade Treaty' (Control Arms, 2006). The Arms

Trade Treaty Steering Committee issued global principles designed to underpin an eventual legally binding treaty covering all conventional arms and their ammunition. The principles are applicable to small arms and light weapons (ATTSC, 2007).

## Holders of small arms in the Philippines

The term 'small arms and light weapons' has yet to become part of official government terminology in the Philippines. Officially, the government uses the term 'firearm', which it defines as including:

> *Rifles, muskets, carbines, shotguns, revolvers, pistols and all other deadly weapons from which a bullet, ball, shot, shell or other missile may be discharged by means of gun powder or other explosives. The term also includes air rifles except those which, being of small calibre and limited range, are used as toys.* (RAC, 1987, sec. 877)

The items listed in this definition of 'firearm' can be rightly categorized as small arms and light weapons, and thus, in the Philippine setting, the two terms are used interchangeably. Government statistics tend to use the term 'firearm'. It must be noted that mortars are included in this category, though landmines are not.

The PNP divides firearms into 'registered' and 'loose'. Registered firearms are those issued with a licence by the Firearms and Explosives Division (FED) of the PNP. The number of registered firearms has been steadily increasing, according to available data for the period 2002–06. In 2002 there were around 775,000 registered firearms, increasing to 814,562 in 2003 and 955,636 in 2004. The increase was minimal in 2005, as only 2,991 firearms were registered in that year, making a total at 958,627. A further 3,859 firearms were registered in the first quarter of 2006, bringing the number of registered firearms to 962,486 by April 2006.[2]

More problematic are 'loose' firearms, which the PNP's FED estimates to be 321,685 as of the end of 2005 (PCTC, 2006). According to the PNP's Philippine Center on Transnational Crime (PCTC), the FED's estimate is based on 'documentary evidence and data collected from intelligence information from [their] operating units' (PCTC, 2006, p. 3). The term 'loose firearms' is confusing in that it includes weapons that are in the possession of armed rebel groups and criminal groups as well as citizens who fail to register their firearms. It also includes weapons that have been bought from licensed dealers but that have not been subsequently registered with the PNP or whose licences have been allowed to expire.

Official figures on loose firearms are conservative. A Philippine Action Network on Small Arms (PhilANSA) briefing indicated that at least 1.2 million firearms could be loose in the country.[3] The 2002 Small Arms Survey, for example, pegs the number of illicit firearms circulating in the Philippines at around 4.2 million, more than ten times bigger than the official figure (Small Arms Survey, 2002, p. 98).

The following analysis examines three groups of small arms and light weapons holders: (1) the state security sector, (2) the civilian sector, and (3) non-state armed groups.

## State security sector and authorized government personnel

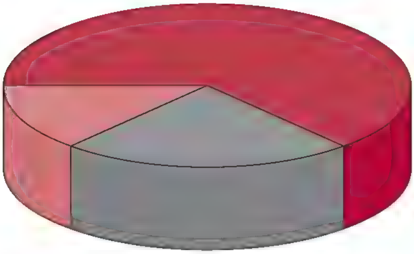
Those in the state security sector include the Philippine Armed Forces (AFP), along with its civilian auxiliary forces—the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units (CAFGUs, see Chapter 8);[4] the Philippine National Police (PNP); and other authorized government agencies, such as the National Bureau of Investigation and the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency. It is assumed that all firearms in the hands of the personnel of these government agencies are licensed.

Statistics from the AFP indicate a total number of AFP military personnel (officers and enlisted personnel) of 118,421 (CAFGU members excluded). Of these, 8 per cent (9,728) are officers, and the rest (108,693) are enlisted personnel.[5] Other statistics from the same source estimate the total strength of CAFGU at 52,066, stationed in 13,399 *barangays* (municipal districts) (Office of the Press Secretary, 2005).

Available data puts the total number of PNP personnel at 114,881 as of the end of November 2006. Of this number, 25 per cent (28,721) are officers, 70 per cent (80,417) are non-commissioned officers, and an estimated 5 per cent (5,744) are non-uniformed personnel (Andrade, 2006).

Figure 10.1

**Official small arms holdings (AFP, PNP, CAFGUs)**



- ● AFP (247,702)
- ● PNP (91,331)
- ● CAFGU (52,066)

**Sources:** AFP Modernization Program (2003); Directorate for Operations, Philippine National Police; Office of the Press Secretary (2005)

PNP sources note that firearms are issued to only 22,976 of the 28,721 officers and 68,355 of the 80,417 non-commissioned officers. Non-uniformed personnel are not issued with firearms. If these figures are correct, the total number of firearms within the PNP is only 91,331.[6]

Data from the AFP shows that some 247,300 firearms issued to and used by its personnel fall into the category of small arms and light weapons. These include 9 mm pistols, .45 pistols, M16s, M14s, carbines, Garands, M60, .30 machine guns, .50 machine guns, M-203 grenade launchers, and mortars. This figure also includes the firearms issued to CAFGUs. Each CAFGU member is issued with one firearm, usually a carbine or Garand. The AFP also purchased 402 units of Squad Automatic Weapons in 2003, bringing the total number of small arms and light weapons in the hands of the Philippine military to 247,702 (AFP Modernization Program, 2003).

The AFP and PNP firearms totals sum to 339,033. This is roughly 35 per cent of the total number of licensed firearms registered with the PNP's FED, which was 962,486 as of the end of April 2006 (PNP, 2006). It is worth noting that there has been an increase in the level of international military aid in response to the significant increase in the level of insurgency affecting different areas of the country, addressed in the other chapters of this book. For example, the United States supplied 30,000 M16 assault rifles in 2001 (Amnesty International, 2002).

## Private civilians

Since less than half of the total number of registered firearms are with the government, more than half must be in the hands of either private security agencies or private individuals. Indeed, a global comparative study conducted in 2007 by the Small Arms Survey revealed that the Philippines has the 20th-largest civilian weapons holdings in the world, with an average estimate for civilian firearms arsenals of 3.9 million, or as many as six firearms per 100 people (Small Arms Survey, 2007, p. 45).

Private security agencies in the Philippines have the largest gun holdings in the private sector. As private entities, they are supervised by the PNP's Security Agencies and Guards Supervision Division (SAGSD), which, as of mid-2006, had registered 1,662 security agencies employing 282,191 licensed security guards. According to SAGSD, it is a standard rule that the ratio of security guards to firearms is 2:1; that is, two security guards share one firearm, handing the weapon to a fellow security guard when they go off duty. Thus, the total number of firearms in the hands of security guards as of mid-2006 is estimated at 142,000 (mostly .38 pistols and shotguns). This represents approximately 15 per cent of the total number of firearms registered with the FED and almost half of the combined firearms for the AFP and the PNP. A disturbing revelation of one study on small arms in the Philippines is that 'private security agencies allegedly equip their workforce with illegally acquired weapons' (Pattugalan, 2004, p. 76).

## Non-state armed groups

A 2006 assessment by the AFP identifies the following as the primary non-state armed groups that possess small arms and light weapons: the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), the Misuari Breakaway Group, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), and the Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement (RSM) (Esperon, 2007, p. 6). Table 10.1 provides a summary of the estimated strength of these armed groups in terms of personnel and firepower, as of mid-2006, according to the AFP.

If the estimates provided by the AFP are correct, a total of 14,878 firearms are in the hands of these non-state armed groups. The firearms in the hands of these non-state armed groups could be appropriately counted as among the so-called loose firearms in the country.

Table 10.1

**Strength of major Philippine non-state armed groups, 2006**

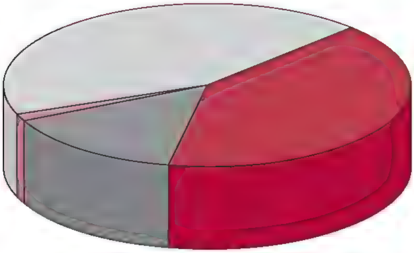
| Group | Personnel | Small arms holdings |
|---|---:|---:|
| CPP-NPA | 7,000 | 6,050 |
| MILF | 11,000 | 8,170 |
| ASG | 500 | 300 |
| MBG | 700 | 300 |
| JI | 30 | 30 |
| RSM | 28 | 28 |

**Source:** Esperon (2007, p. 6)

However, it is possible that a great number of these firearms were once 'registered', since one of the sources of firearms for these armed groups is the state security sector itself. These weapons could end up in the hands of armed groups either through the firearms the military and the police lose to these groups during armed encounters or through state security personnel selling their weapons to these groups (Davis, 2003, p. 3).

Figure 10.2

**Total small arms holdings**



- ● State security sector (391,099)
- ● Private security guards (141,096)
- ● Non-state armed groups (14,878)
- ● Private citizens (415,413)

**Sources:** Non-state armed groups from Esperon (2007); security guards from SAGSD, Philippine National Police; state security sector from Figure 10.1; figure for private citizens extrapolated by subtracting the previous figures from FED figures on registered firearms.

## Diffusion of small arms in the Philippines: the demand dimension

The demand for small arms and light weapons from the state and its security forces stems from their need not only to demonstrate armed strength to their national and international audiences but to defend themselves against non-state forces seeking to undermine territorial integrity and challenge the government. In a society like that of the Philippines, in which internal conflicts are being fought mainly through guerilla warfare, small arms are a preferred weapon. For members of the government security forces that are pitted against insurgents and other groups that continue to challenge the government, small arms can also be useful as 'self-protection or self-defence, in close or short-range combat, direct or indirect fire . . .' (Sukma, 2004, p. 3).

Beyond state forces, the strong demand for small arms in the Philippines has its roots in the country's distinct historic, economic, and socio-cultural contexts. Historically, Filipinos have recognized and articulated their right to bear arms in the context of their struggles against Spanish, US, and Japanese colonial rule. Even before the arrival of Spanish colonizers, Filipinos were already skilled in manufacturing and using firearms, specifically light artillery pieces called *lantakas* (Molina, 1993, p. 18). Culturally, the gun has acquired a special place in Filipino society as a form of display of personal power. Some military officers who have been assigned to the Mindanao region point out that owning guns has become standard in the area, though this has yet to be empirically verified. Gun ownership is seen as being closely related to conceptions of masculinity, although female insurgents also use firearms, including some widows of insurgents who elect to continue their deceased husbands' battles (PhilANSA, 2008). Female AFP and PNP personnel are also issued with firearms, though they tend to be assigned positions at headquarters and are not usually deployed in combat operations.

Ownership of guns is seen as a key factor shaping local politics in areas of the Philippines in which political warlords hold sway. Guns are used not only as a form of protection against political rivals but also as a means of ensuring victory in local elections. The case study on Abra province in Chapter 9 indicates that electoral prospects are helped—if not guaranteed—if the aspirant has control over a private army.

Sectors lobbying for ownership of firearms argue that they need them for survival and security. In conflict zones in Mindanao, most civilian households have at least one firearm at home. The state is not only perceived as incapable of providing security to the people, it is also seen as unable to administer justice. This fuels people's demand for firearms, either to take matters into their own hands or to protect themselves from a poorly functioning law-enforcement mechanism. In some cases, it is both (Molina, 1993, p. 151).

But motivations are just one aspect of the demand side of small arms. In line with the preliminary findings of a project initiated by the Small Arms Survey, 'demand can be understood as the interplay between motivations (deep and derived preferences) and means (prices and resources)' (Small Arms Survey, 2006, p. 142). Demand is affected by many factors, including levels of violence, the price of weapons relative to other goods, group pressure to arm or disarm, and the perceived likelihood that carrying and using a gun will have legal consequences. The following sections, on the supply dimension and on the regulatory framework for possession and use, fill in parts of the picture.

## Small arms proliferation in the Philippines: the supply dimension

As in many other contexts, the illicit sources of small arms for the Philippines are more of a problem than the legal ones, as they are beyond the control and monitoring system of the government. Illicit sources include smuggling, diversions from legal stockpiles ('leakages'), and local manufacture.

Several factors motivate the smuggling of firearms across South-east Asia. First, countries from the region, the Philippines included, continue to be saddled with intra-state conflicts, which increase the demand for illegal firearms. Some states in the region supply small arms to insurgents in neighbouring states. In the Philippines, the NPA is reported to have received shipments from China in the 1970s while, more recently, the MILF allegedly received arms from sources as distant as Afghanistan, which, according to some sources, were financed by Osama bin Laden (Capie, 2001; Garrido, 2003). Others dispute the supposed connection to bin Laden (see Chapter 4 and Davis, 2003).

Second, post-conflict states provide a ready supply of arms for sale. Most of the weapons in circulation across the region are from existing stockpiles and are not newly manufactured; there is a significant relationship between the number of stockpiles and the number of illicit firearms (Greene, 1998).[7] The end of the Vietnam War, for example, is seen as having a perverse effect on the diffusion of small arms in the region, with Cambodia providing most of the supplies and Thailand acting as a major transit point (Bedeski, Andersen, and Darmosumarto, 1998, p. 1; Kramer, 2001, p. 41). In the case of the Philippines, a 2003 report by *Jane's Intelligence Review* notes that the MILF and the MNLF may have imported 'supplies of US materiel abandoned in Vietnam after the communist victory of 1975 and later sold onto the international arms market' (Davis, 2003, p. 3).

The Philippines' various ports of entry have been used to bring firearms into the country. Its main international airport has been utilized—the PNP intercepted 334 assorted smuggled firearms originating from the United States between 1991 and 1999—but it is the maritime ports that have been used most commonly (PCTC, 2006, p. 8).

The Philippines' archipelagic nature, characterized by its long maritime boundaries, facilitates small arms smuggling by insurgent groups which use Sabah, Malaysia, as the transit point into Mindanao (Kramer, 2001, p. 43). Two key areas have been identified in Mindanao where arms shipments have been moved ashore from small fishing vessels: the Illana Bay coastline, north of Cotabato, and Sultan Gumander in Lanao Del Sur (Davis, 2003, p. 3). In 1992, a shipment mostly of M16 US-made rifles was unloaded in Mindanao. Smuggling of firearms in Mindanao is reportedly rampant in the following provinces: Agusan, Misamis, Surigao, Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, and Zamboanga (PCTC, 2006, p. 8).

In March 2004, agents of the Manila International Container Terminal intercepted *balikbayan* (returning Filipino) boxes containing 5 .45 pistols, a .40 handgun, a Ruger Mini-M14 rifle, and several thousand rounds of ammunition. More than a year later, in April 2005, the Philippine Bureau of Customs intercepted ten 12-gauge shotguns and a .45 pistol, altogether worth PHP 10 million (USD 211,000),[8] and 75 rounds of ammunition per shotgun at Manila's container port. They were shipped in three container vans together with old clothes (De Jesus and Pascua, 2006).

In late 2005 a US court found a Filipino-American guilty of smuggling arms to Mindanao between 2003 and 2005. The smuggler's shipments comprised AK47s, M16s, and HK94s as well as ammunition, and were intercepted by Philippine authorities. They had been concealed in 'sealed boxes containing items like light fixtures and electric car coolers' (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2005). More recently, 'door to door deliveries of packages, big equipments, appliances and even International Aid and [donations]' have been used for the illicit transfer of firearms (PCTC, 2006, p. 7).

Despite the scale of smuggling hinted at by those attempts that have been intercepted, this is not the main source of illicit arms in the Philippines. Diversion and leakages constitute the largest source of illicit arms proliferation in the black market. Weapons from government stockpiles fall into unauthorized hands through insurgent operations, theft, and illegal sales by corrupt members of the police or military.

AFP statistics show that, in 2005, close to 300 military firearms were lost as a result of armed confrontation with several rebel groups, more than 200 to the NPA, 15 to the MILF, and more than 20 to the ASG.[9] Police officers have also been targeted for their weapons: the PCTC has identified *Agaw Armas* (snatch a firearm), a specific tactic used by criminals and dissidents who threaten police officers and seize their firearms (PCTC, 2006). In some instances, NPA combatants dressed as police officers have been able to walk into police stations and remove weapons.

Military and police personnel are not always innocent in the transfer of weapons from state arsenals to non-state armed groups. The 2003 *Jane's Intelligence Review* reports 'widespread sales of munitions by corrupt elements in the AFP to dealers who then sell to insurgents or criminals' (Davis, 2003). The PCTC points to '[e]conomic difficulties, pressure from peers and the need [for] cash' as motivations for government personnel in charge of AFP and PNP stockpiles to sell firearms (PCTC, 2006). According to the same report, a senior Philippine Army officer apparently confirmed that, in Sulu, from 1972 to 1986, a total of 8,000 firearms, specifically Garands, M14s, and M16s, were unaccounted for (Davis, 2003, p.4). When interviewed for this volume, former ASG leader Khadaffy Janjalani said the group had 'no problem buying guns due to the plentiful supply from either gun smugglers, Recom [Philippine National Police Regional Command] or Southcom [Armed Forced of the Philippines Southern Command] soldiers who badly need cash' (see Chapter 5).[10]

'Gray transfers' of weapons from state to non-state actors have also been reported in the Philippines (Capie, 2001). These are often clandestine and vary from the legally questionable to the outright illegal. The PNP has acknowledged that firearms dealers 'acquire from PNP headquarters in Manila import permits on behalf of a local government agency for a number of weapons greater than that for which official funds are available', selling the excess number quietly onto the black market (Davis, 2003, p.5).

Another source of small arms in the country is local manufacturing. The Philippines has a large private arms industry, which, in 2004, was said to number '45 legal manufacturers of small arms, 522 authorized dealers and 133 gun repair shops' (Pattugalan, 2004, p. 76). The most important among these is ArmsCor, which has its main plant in Marikina in Metro Manila. It dominates the arms industry in the Philippines, with one estimate giving it at least an 80 per cent share of the country's production, at least 70 per cent of which is exported (Kraft, 2004, pp. 79–81). Their products, aside from a variety of pistols, include less powerful copies of the M16 and AK47 assault rifles as well as 11 types of bolt-action rifle (Capie, 2002, p. 71).

Illegal manufacturers have provided many of the 'loose' small arms which are accessed by both criminal elements and some of the private armed groups across the country. These manufacturers supply local illegal gun shops, largely in Mindanao, as well as international buyers. Local arms manufacturing is concentrated in Danao City, where various handguns are manufactured, including .22, 5.56, and .38 revolvers and .45 cal pistols (PCTC, 2006, p. 8). Some 3,000 gunsmiths and almost 25,000 people are estimated to rely on gun manufacturing for a living in Danao (Pattugalan, 2004, p. 76). There are two licensed

A worker at a workshop in Danao crafts copies of weapons produced by Western arms manufacturers on 10 January 2007. © Lucian Read/Small Arms Survey manufacturers in the area, the Danao Arms Corporation (DAMCOR) and the Workers League of Danao Multi-Purpose Cooperative (WORLD-MPC), which are allowed to produce a total of 6,000 firearms annually (PCTC, 2006, p. 11). The city has long been associated with the simple paltik handgun, which has been locally produced since 1928 (Gantuangko, 1996, pp. 8–15). Today, with improved skills, Danao gunsmiths are able to produce cheap replicas of powerful imported long firearms, such as Armalites; machine pistols including KG-9s, Uzis, and Ingrams; and assault rifles, such as baby Armalites, as well as silencers and other gun accessories (Jimeno, 2002).

The MILF is reported to have been producing its weapons through its 'production facilities, manned by skilled gunsmiths', some of whom are trained abroad (Davis, 2003, p. 35). Weapons produced by the MILF include RPG-2, M-79 grenade launchers, .45 pistols, and crude anti-personnel mines and bombs (Davis, 2003, p. 35).

## Addressing the proliferation of small arms

Several mechanisms have been instituted at both the international and the regional levels to address the issue of small arms and light weapons. One of these is the UN Firearms Protocol adopted in 2001, which is aimed primarily at curtailing the illicit manufacture and trafficking of firearms by criminal organizations.

Another is the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (UNPoA). The UNPoA contains provisions on dealing with illicit small arms and light weapons, and sets more stringent standards on previously contested areas such as marking, record keeping and tracing, security of official arms stocks, disposal and destruction of 'surplus' and seized weapons, cooperation in preventing dispersion of arms shipments, and systematic support for weapons collection and for integrating disarmament into post-conflict demobilization and peace processes. At present, the UNPoA is the central non-binding global agreement on preventing and reducing trafficking and proliferation of small arms and light weapons, though the process is becoming more fragmented as parallel initiatives gather steam (Small Arms Survey, 2007, pp. 117–38).

These are positive initiatives, but there are significant challenges blocking their effective implementation, foremost among which is the willingness of states to adopt these international instruments. The Programme entered into force in mid-2005, with 40 ratifications—the minimum required—but, as of August 2009, the Philippines has yet to sign and ratify it. Implementation of the UNPoA has been slow for many reasons, including the conflicting interests of participating states and a lack of political will to support consensus on certain issues (Small Arms Survey, 2007, pp. 119–21).

Meanwhile, the compatibility or complementarity of these international instruments with national policies needs to be examined. In the case of the Philippines, addressing the problem of small arms diffusion requires examining the legislation pertaining to firearms as well as government programmes aimed at recovering unregistered firearms. Several policy initiatives have been undertaken since 2001 and reported under the framework of the UNPoA.

## The regulatory framework on small arms possession in the Philippines

The Philippines has a set of national laws and various administrative orders intended to address the problem of the diffusion of small arms in the country. Successive laws and presidential decrees have made it more difficult to own and use firearms, but the regulations are still lax, and there are significant weaknesses, such as a poor licensing regime (Kramer, 2001).

In 1972, after declaring martial law, former President Ferdinand Marcos issued General Order No. 6, which prohibits citizens of the Philippines from keeping firearms without legally issued permits and prohibits them from carrying their firearms outside their residence.

Subsequently, in 1983, Marcos issued Presidential Decree 1866, known as the Firearms Law of the Philippines. This was later amended by Republic Act 8294 passed by the Philippine Congress in 1997. Decree 1866 prohibits and penalizes the illegal and unlawful manufacture, acquisition, and possession of firearms and explosives. Act 8294 provides for stiffer penalties.

Related to Decree 1866, the Revised Administrative Code (RAC, 1987) stipulates that it is 'unlawful for any person to import, manufacture, deal in, receive, buy, sell, dispose of, or possess any firearm', its parts, ammunition, or any material used in the manufacture of firearms or its parts and ammunition. The code also decrees that dealers should not sell or deliver firearms or their parts and ammunition until the buyer has obtained the necessary licence. Those convicted of violating this provision will be imprisoned and fined as determined by Philippine courts.

Regarding the export, import, transit, and retransfer of small arms, Republic Act No. 1937 (1978), known as the Tariff and Customs Code of the Philippines, prohibits, unless authorized by law, the importation of 'dynamite, gunpowder, ammunition, and other explosives, firearms and weapons of war' and related parts. It also stipulates that a new licence must be obtained if a dealer intends to import, buy, or possess firearms or ammunition in excess of what is previously allowed in his original licence.

The National Emergency Memorandum Order No. 6 issued by President Aquino in early 1990 provides for the registration of firearms, ammunition, explosives, and related ingredients. It also calls for the recovery of unlicensed firearms and military equipment and a full accounting of all these materials. In September 1990, the Department of Interior and Local Government (1990) issued Department Circular 02, which calls for the annual verification of firearms. This circular was meant to 'determine the actual existence of firearms' and verify whether those holding licences are still qualified to do so and have paid the necessary fees. If a licence holder fails to show his firearm for verification, his licence will be cancelled and his firearm confiscated.

In 1993, the PNP issued Circular No. 07 on the recognition and operation of gun clubs. This circular attempts to control and monitor the transport of firearms and ammunition held by gun club members. It stipulates that the PNP can withdraw a gun club's licence to operate if its members fail to fulfil the requirements set by the chief of the PNP.

In an attempt to curb violence related to elections, people are prevented from carrying or transporting firearms during election periods, even if they are licensed to do so, though exemptions can be issued by the Commission on Elections. During election periods, firearms licences cannot be issued, as stipulated by Resolution No. 2735, promulgated in 1994.

Beyond electoral periods, one of the main problems in regulating firearms in the country pertains to licensing. Licensing requirements appear to be lax, with applicants for licences merely required to undergo a mental health examination and background checks, and to pay an application fee. In the Philippines, any Filipino of 21 years of age or older can possess a maximum of two firearms for as long as he passes the neuropsychiatric test and pays the commensurate fee (Pattugalan, 2004, p. 81). More stringent requirements—such as a shooting test; or a medical and mental health exam; or checks on criminal records, domestic violence, and good behaviour—are not in place (Misalucha, 2004, p. 134). Licensing is highly centralized: the head of the police forces is required to approve all licences (as in Indonesia and Thailand), which can place an unmanageable burden on the licensing office if demand is high (Legaspi, 2005). Indeed, in some instances applicants have been issued with licences without appearing personally at the FED as required due to poor controls over operating procedures (IANSA, 2003, p. 126).

Also limited is the capacity of the Department of Health to monitor drug and neurological testing centres closely to ensure that the proper tests are administered to prospective applicants. The quality of the tests and the reliability of the results are therefore not assured.

Furthermore, those who possess firearms can secure a Permit to Carry Firearms Outside of Residence (PCTFOR) if they are able to prove that a threat against them exists. Proving that such a threat exists is not difficult. More than 32,000 PTCFORs were issued by the Philippine police in 2002 (*Manila Times*, 2003). PTCFORs were suspended in 2003 until May 2004 in an attempt to reduce the volume of guns on the streets. During the suspension, those applying for them had to prove that there was an actual threat to their lives, and the proof had to be 'validated by the chief of police in the area where the individual resides or where an incident happened [and] further validated by the regional intelligence officer' (Kraft, 2004, p. 73). The suspension dramatically reduced the number of PTCFORs issued by the police, but 2,000 permits were issued even during the suspension, which is still high (Pattugalan, 2004, p. 82).

Regardless of the absolute numbers involved, allowing civilians to carry firearms outside of their residence creates the danger of these firearms being used against fellow civilians, sometimes because of minor traffic altercations. The

Philippine Center for Transnational Crime acknowledges that, of the 3,670 cases involving the use of firearms from 1993 to 1998, almost 7 per cent involved licensed firearms (PCTC, 2006, p. 5). This, of course, means that the vast majority of crimes—more than 93 per cent of all gun-related crimes in the country—involved unlicensed guns (PCTC, 2006; Garrido, 2003).

In addition to the relatively lax policies regarding firearms possession by private citizens in the Philippines, a law increasing national transparency and enhancing the monitoring capability of the Philippine government is still lacking. Also lacking are specific laws prohibiting and penalizing the transfer of firearms to non-state actors. As a result, the Philippines' formal position on the implementation of the UNPoA is undermined by its failure to incorporate its provisions into existing national policies and laws (Misalucha, 2004, pp. 133–38).

Associated with licensing, the marking and tracing of weapons and their related parts is a key element of firearms regulation. The Philippine government claims that it has 'comprehensive and accurate records of the manufacture and holding of small arms and light weapons' (Government of the Philippines, 2006). According to an official from the Philippine Center for Transnational Crime, firearms manufacturers are required to mark their products with distinctive marks, firearm model, and serial numbers on the receiver, barrel, and slide of the firearm. The firearm type, make, calibre, and serial number must be indicated on the licences buyers must acquire from police authorities. But an official from the PCTC admits it is very difficult to monitor firearms because their parts could be disassembled and the serial numbers replaced.[11]

An amnesty programme for firearms was initiated in 2003 in an attempt to encourage holders of unlicensed firearms to register them with the FED. Included in the amnesty programme are handguns, shotguns, rifles, and other low-powered firearms, with high-powered ones being dealt with on a 'case-to-case basis', as provided in Executive Order 171 (Pattugalan, 2004, p. 82). The amnesty programme was not as effective as was hoped, however. A subsequent Executive Order (No. 585) issued on 11 December 2006 acknowledges that 'despite the issuance of Executive Orders Nos. 171 and 390, an estimated 304,262 loose firearms remain to be accounted and licensed'.

## Recovering ‘loose’ firearms

The Philippine government claims that it has also been actively pursuing the recovery of unlicensed or ‘loose’ firearms in the country. The PNP has undertaken various initiatives, such as OPLAN (Operations Plan) *Paglalansag* (Disband), OPLAN *Bakal* (Steel), and OPLAN *Kapkap* (Frisk). Paglalansag was meant to disband the private armed groups of politicians and other individuals and confiscate their firearms, whether legal or illegally held. OPLAN Bakal and OPLAN Kapkap involved spot checks of firearms carried in public places.

The PNP claims that these programmes have resulted in the recovery of 45,000 firearms, which are now held by the FED. This figure is, however, only around 14 per cent of the total number (321,685) of loose firearms that the FED itself estimates to be circulating in the country (PCTC, 2006).

The PNP has also been implementing a programme to recall firearms from retired or dismissed personnel. Figures from police headquarters show that, at the end of 2006, almost half (9,612) of the firearms have been recovered from the total of 15,346 weapons to be recalled (PCTC, 2006).

The Balik-baril programme, initiated in 1987, is meant to encourage insurgents to turn in their firearms in exchange for support with reintegration into civilian life. The AFP is tasked with administering the retrieval of firearms, while the Department of Social Welfare and Development provides livelihood assistance (Muggah, 2004, p. 27). The programme is falling short in its implementation, however, primarily because of its limited information campaign and the perception that it is merely an anti-insurgency tactic, which makes insurgents unwilling to bring in their weapons. Figures from the AFP show that, from 2002 to early 2006, 804 firearms and 112 explosives were turned in by rebel-returnees from the CPP-NPA.[12] For the same period, some 2,488 firearms and 471 explosives came from returnees from the various armed groups in Mindanao. The government, via the AFP, has spent slightly more than PHP 34 million (USD 650,000 ) on the programme, equivalent to PHP 8,834 (USD 170) spent for each firearm or explosive returned.[13]

The military has noted that ‘many of the weapons surrendered were unserviceable and rusty’, and the payments received were simply used to buy better weapons (Pattugalan, 2004, p. 83). Worse, it is also possible that surrendered weapons were simply sold back to insurgents or to the black market by

AFP personnel, given the inadequate 'supervision and accountability' as well as 'destruction mechanisms' (Pattugalan, 2004, p. 82). High-powered firearms were not surrendered, probably because of the 'low valuation of weapons' (Pattugalan, 2004). The government's payment offers for surrendered weapons are substantially lower than black market rates. When first initiated, compensation for turning in an M16 was only PHP 9,000–15,000 (USD 170–290), while the weapon could be sold in the illicit market for as much as PHP 40,000 (USD 770). For a .45 pistol, the government's rate was PHP 1,000–2,000 (USD 20–40) compared with at least PHP 25,000 (USD 480) elsewhere (Muggah, 2004).[14] These figures have since been increased. For example, rebels who surrender either an M16 or an M14 assault rifle will receive PHP 35,000 (USD 670) under the Balik-baril programme, according to AFP regional spokesman Lyndon Sollesta (Bayoran, 2006).[15]

Meanwhile, firearms have also been recovered from the various non-state armed groups in military operations. According to the AFP, military operations in 2006 recovered 576 firearms from the CPP-NPA, 252 from the MILF, and 20 from the ASG. But these represent only 9 per cent of the estimated total number (6,050) of firearms in the hands of the CPP-NPA, 3 per cent that of the firearms currently held (8,170) by the MILF, and 6 per cent of the 300 members of the ASG held in 2006 (Esperon, 2007, p. 6).

## Conclusion

Although figures for the numbers of small arms in circulation are wildly divergent, by every account, their availability constitutes a problem that the government of the Philippines needs to tackle with urgency. Attempts have been made to address various aspects of the issue, in particular under the framework of UNPoA commitments. But, as has been pointed out in other studies, these have often been disjointed and sometimes contradictory (IANSA, 2003, p. 127).

In order to address effectively the problem of small arms and light weapons proliferation in the country, the Philippine government needs to consider both why there is a demand for firearms in the country and the sources of these weapons. Many proposals for addressing the problem of small arms proliferation have been previously put forth by several authors and are contained in various reports, such as the *Small Arms Survey* and the UNPoA. They are reiterated here. As a baseline for addressing the problem of small arms, however, more accurate knowledge of the numbers of weapons in circulation, in particular illicit weapons categorized as 'loose', needs to be obtained.

The dynamics underpinning demand need to be addressed. Currently, the motivations for acquiring guns are manifold in the Philippines and include the ongoing armed conflicts, particularly in Mindanao; high levels of political violence, especially during electoral periods; and perceived high crime rates. Yet the cost of acquiring guns is low both in terms of monetary value and in terms of the risk of facing legal action or social stigma as a consequence of having or using a gun.

There are a number of steps the government should take to tackle small arms proliferation and misuse. On the demand side, it should adopt more stringent requirements in issuing licences. Neuropsychiatric tests are insufficient. The government should instead conduct a background investigation of the character of a person applying for a licence in order to be able to conduct a better assessment of his or her capacity to handle a gun. Applicants should not have a criminal record or history of violent behaviour. In addition to more stringent requirements for licensing, the government should refrain as far as possible from issuing permits to carry firearms outside of a person's residence. As well, the government should consider increasing the age for qualifying for licences from 21 to 25 years. Decentralizing the process might prevent backlogs and possibly lessen the tendency for applicants not to follow the process and meet the requirements. There are risks involved, however; it could actually lead to more firearms, albeit licensed, in the hands of private citizens, who might find it easier to secure permits from local authorities, particularly if they happen to have close personal connections with relevant officials.

Regulating the circulation of firearms in the Philippines requires strengthening the capacity of regulatory agencies, such as the FED, to mark and trace weapons and their related parts. It is difficult to prevent firearms from being disassembled and their serial numbers replaced, however. Donor support could help ensure that the police and law-enforcement agencies have the capacity to implement measures aimed at reducing small arms proliferation and misuse. Anti-corruption efforts targeted at these institutions are also important; those responsible for failing to implement legislation on small arms, or who violate the law, should not enjoy de facto immunity from prosecution (IANSA, 2003, p. 127).

In the meantime, the various efforts to recover 'loose' firearms, such as the numerous OPLANs (*Paglalansag*, *Bakal*, and *Kapkap*, among others), need to be consistently implemented if they are to win the support of a sceptical general public.

The Balik-baril buy-back programme needs to be reconceptualized. At present, participants simply turn in their gun in exchange for livelihood assistance. The quality of the gun needs to be considered and its functionality assured before it is accepted by the government and a commensurate fee paid. In a related measure, the government should pay realistic and close-to-market figures for firearms surrendered in order to encourage their owners to turn them in to the government rather than sell them on the black market. Instead of offering money for guns, communities should engage in weapons-for-development programmes rather than buy-backs.

HOLDING AREA
PLS OBSERVE
RULE OF SILENCE

More than a hundred prisoners sit in the holding area at the Quezon City Hall of Justice on 31 January 2007, as they wait to be called before prosecutors and judges to be accused or tried. Hundreds of prisoners are held in the city's overcrowded jails on charges related to gun possession and the use of guns in crimes. © Lucian Read/Small Arms Survey

Efforts to decrease the demand for small arms must be complemented with efforts to lessen the supply of available firearms. The government, through the Philippine Coast Guard and the Philippine Navy, must intensify its border patrol operations so as to deter and apprehend smugglers of firearms on the seas. More stringent measures to monitor incoming cargo must also be put in place by the customs office, in both the sea and airports of the country, to discourage people from bringing firearms illicitly into the country and to intercept those who do so.

More stringent accounting, inventory taking, and monitoring of firearms stockpiles of both the Philippine military and the national police are needed to minimize and prevent further leakages of firearms from government inventory.

Local manufacture of firearms should be addressed. Steps are needed to bring unlicensed manufacturers into the formal economy. In its 2006 progress report on the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA), the government said '[l]aw enforcement agencies are exerting all efforts to arrest illegal gun manufactures for violation of or existing Firearms Law' (Government of the Philippines, 2006, p. 9). But no mention is made of efforts to support alternative livelihoods for the many families that rely on the craft gun production. The government claims 'the decentralization of processing of license applications at the regional level may encourage illegitimate manufacturers to come out in the open and abide with the regulations' (Government of the Philippines, 2006, p. 9). More stringent requirements for acquiring business permits could be considered.

All of the above measures require the close coordination of groups that advocate and work with the Philippine government for the reduction, if not the elimination, of arms in the Philippines. While it may be impossible to eliminate the circulation of small arms, these measures should at least help the government minimize the number of firearms in the Philippines. ■

## Endnotes

1 The author thanks Mr. Joseph Raymond S Franco for his assistance with research for this chapter.

2 Figures for the years 2002 and 2003 were culled from Philippine Action Network on Small Arms Report on the People's Consultations in the Philippines on the Arms Trade Treaty (27 April 2007). Figures for the years 2004–06 were extrapolated from Firearms Trafficking Branch,

Firearms and Explosives Division of the Philippine National Police, Semi-Annual Report (2006, p. 3).

3 The briefing was given at the Linden Suites in Pasig on 17 April 2007.

4 As discussed in Chapter 8, the CAFGU is a continuation of the village defence units under the AFP and formalized as the AFP's paramilitary group through Executive Order 264 by former President Aquino. Regular units of the AFP utilize them to consolidate and hold areas that have been cleared of insurgents. In areas classified as influenced by insurgents, CAFGUs provide intelligence and combat support for regular AFP units. See Quitoriano and Libre (2001, pp. 27–28).

5 Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, OJ1, Armed Forces of the Philippines, Quezon City.

6 Directorate for Operations, Philippine National Police.

7 Cited in Capie (2001, p. 58).

8 Currency conversion rate at 1 April 2005.

9 Figures provided by the AFP, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, OJ3.

10 Professor Octavio Dinampo interviewed Khadaffy Janjalani on 27 February 2006 in Basilan.

11 Point raised during the roundtable discussion entitled 'Armed and Aimless: Armed Groups, Guns and Human Security in the Economic Organization of West African States (ECOWAS) Region' held at the Third World Studies Center, University of the Philippines, 8 November 2005.

12 Figures provided by the AFP Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, OJ3.

13 Ibid. USD rate added using conversion rate at 31 January 2006.

14 USD rate added using conversion rate at 31 January 2006.

15 USD rate added using conversion rate at 31 January 2006.

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## Part Two

# ARMED GROUP PROFILES

*By Soliman M. Santos, Jr. and Paz Verdades M. Santos*

# COMMUNIST FRONT

# CHAPTER 11

# Communist Party of the Philippines and its New People's Army (CPP-NPA)

## Overview

The New People's Army (NPA) is the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). It was established in 1969 as the radical Maoist alternative to the pro-Soviet *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas*. Though both organizations are by and large ideologically driven armed groups waging what they call a 'protracted people's war' in the Philippine countryside, they are currently classified as terrorist organizations by the United States, the European Union, Canada, and Australia. The CPP-NPA currently poses the greatest armed threat to the Philippine government and has the widest grass-roots support among the various Philippine leftist insurgent groups (Abuza, 2005). The conflict between the CPP-NPA and the Philippine government has taken thousands of lives since the NPA's inception.[1] President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has made a military end to the decades-old conflict a central goal of her administration (Avendaño, 2006a).

## Basic characteristics

### Typology

The NPA is a Communist rebel group that seeks to overthrow the Philippine government and replace it with a 'national democratic' alternative through 'protracted people's war', with guerrilla warfare the main form of warfare in the early stages. It falls under the leadership of the CPP and forms part of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), the political wing of the CPP and an umbrella organization of all the national democratic mass organizations. The NPA has made a concerted effort to return to a peasant-based rural war, without abandoning wider diplomatic efforts through the NDFP, its legal organizations, allied NGOs and people's organizations, and electoral participation.

## Current status

There has been some resurgence of the group since 1995 (Barabicho, 2003, pp. 5–7; Szajkowski, 2004, p. 406). The NPA lacks the military weight and support base to fully impose itself on the Philippine political landscape, but it is unlikely that it will disappear as an active stakeholder (Caouette, 2004). Given the widespread poverty and population growth in the country, there is no shortage of disenfranchised poor who might be recruited to the CPP and NPA cause, though the groups' recent record of harnessing latent public dissatisfaction is not as good as it was in the 1970s and 1980s. The CPP's designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the US State Department on 9 August 2002 and President Arroyo's policy of all-out war have hurt the organization as well as any chance for peace. Peace talks with the government were suspended in August 2004 at the NDFP's insistence.

## Origins

The NPA was founded by a newly re-established CPP in Central Luzon (Tarlac and Pampanga provinces) on 29 March 1969, with Bernabé Buscayno as the founding commander-in-chief. It began with just 60 guerrillas and 35 weapons (9 automatic rifles and 26 single-shot rifles and handguns) but expanded under President Ferdinand Marcos's martial law regime. The emphasis on the rural areas for guerilla warfare—an adaptation of Mao's guerilla strategy—was crucial to the NPA's early success. In 1985, it declared that it was nearing a military victory (CPP, 1993, pp. 35–36, 44).

## Aims and ideology

The NPA, together with the CPP and NDFP, aims to overthrow the Philippine government and establish a 'national democratic' state in the Philippines. After a split in 1992, the main force under the ideological leadership of Jose Maria Sison (see 'Leadership', below) 'reaffirmed' its emphasis on building a support base in rural villages—moving away from the urban guerrilla insurgency that had begun to characterize the NPA—with the goal of encircling the cities where organized support forces would await them to form a coalition transitional council and, ultimately, a national democratic government. The NDFP coordinates different sectoral fronts and supports the CPP-NPA in its political, diplomatic, and financial activities. The CPP aggressively opposes US intervention in Philippine politics, economy, and culture.

Perhaps the overriding issue of concern for the NPA leadership is the movement's stagnation at a stage of 'strategic defensive', the first of three stages in Maoism's protracted people's war (to be followed by the strategic stalemate and strategic offensive). The NPA has proven incapable of capturing or purchasing the amounts of weapons and ammunition required to ramp up the war. Along with a broader mass base and the establishment of guerrilla bases, such an escalation would be required before any meaningful advance of the CPP-NPA cause.

## Leadership

Jose Maria 'Joma' Sison (alias Amado Guerrero) is the founding leader of the CPP-NPA. Since 1986, he has been in exile in Utrecht, The Netherlands, where his official title is Chief Political Consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP). He is believed to still be the ideological and political leader of the CPP and to have released policy documents under the pseudonym Armando Liwanag. Sison is also reported to still be the chairman of the CPP Central Committee, a claim he consistently denies (Zamora, 2006). Military sources state that the CPP's day-to-day operations are overseen by Benito Tiamzon and his wife Wilma, who both sit on the Politburo and are part of a Luzon-based executive committee (Execom).[2]

The hierarchy and chains of command of the CPP and NPA are tightly guarded secrets. Mobile phones, encrypted email, couriers, and letters are used in communications between the Netherlands and the Philippines.

A number of former NPA leaders have separated from the group, including former NPA chief Romulo Kintanar, who split from the CPP in 1992 and was liquidated by the NPA in 2002 (Rosal, 2003). Rodolfo Salas, CPP Chair in 1977–86 and NPA chief in 1976–86, also left the party (Salas, 2003). Filemon 'Ka Popoy' Lagman, former head of the Manila-Rizal Regional Party Committee and political leader of the splinter group Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB), was assassinated in 2001; the NPA categorically denied responsibility for Lagman's death.

JUSTICE
FOR Prof. Jose
Maria Sison!
HONG KONG DEFEND

Filipino protestors in Hong Kong call on the Dutch court to resist political pressures in ruling on CPP founding chairman Jose Maria Sison's case, 25 September 2007. © Andrew Ross/AFP

## Support

### Political base

The NPA's lasting political base remains the rural peasantry, though the CPP-NPA-NDFP also establishes support infrastructure in urban areas. The NDFP has organizations and activists among youth, women, farmers, and other sectors, such as the *Kabataang Makabayan* (Patriotic Youth), *Makabayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan* (MAKIBAKA or Patriotic Movement of New Women), and the *Pambansang Katipunan ng Mga Magbubukid* (National Association of Peasants), which are listed on its website.

Party list organizations *Bayan Muna* (People First), *Anak ng Bayan* (Children of the People) Youth Party, *Anakpawis* (Toiling Masses), women's group *Gabriela, Migrante* (Migrants) Sectoral Party, the *Suara Bangsamoro* Party, and other groups, such as the League of Filipino Students and human rights group *Karapatan* (Rights), have been identified with the NDFP (Leftist Parties of the World, 2004; Cervantes, 2006). Bayan Muna won three seats in Congress, Anak Pawis won two, and Gabriela won one seat in the 2004 part-list elections, according to 2005 Electoral Commission records. All six party list representatives have been accused of rebellion. Motorcycle-riding gunmen, suspected of being military death squads of the Arroyo government, have summarily executed hundreds of legal activists, apparently because of their alleged association with the NDFP (AI, 2006). The groups deny any such association.

## Combatants and constituency

During the 1970s and 1980s, thousands of educated and committed youths from the cities joined the NPA, to be met by similarly well-educated, cosmopolitan, and urban unit leaders. The composition of the NPA today is different, with the ranks mainly made up of rural youths, often in their late teens and early twenties. There is a high reported turnover in the ranks.[3] Levels of education and political sophistication have reportedly also declined across the NPA's leadership, though recent perceptions and experiences of government corruption, repression, abuse, and poverty are prompting students to join mass actions and mass organizations, a recruitment base for the CPP-NPA-NDFP (see Chapter 1).

Members of the NPA march in formation inside a remote camp in Davao to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Communist Party of the Philippines, 26 December 2008. © AFP

There have been recent successful attempts to rebuild a depleted civilian base from the grass roots after the peasant mass base was damaged by military and political losses in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The CPP states that it has 120 guerilla fronts in '10,000 of the more than 40,000 barrios of the Philippines', though current intelligence estimates put the number of the country's villages affected by the NPA at 1,442 (AFP intelligence (J-2) estimates for the 3rd Quarter of 2008) (CPP, 2007).

## Sources of financing and support

The NPA's finances and external support are limited. Most of its funding is derived from 'revolutionary taxes' and 'permits to campaign' during elections. A government study estimates that the rebels raise about PHP 4 billion (USD 78.2 million) a year, including PHP 1.5 billion (USD 29 million) collected from companies, compared with the cost of NPA 'fundraising' activities of PHP 108 million (USD 2 million) in 1999 and PHP 12 million (USD 230,000) in 1997 (Agence France Presse, 2003; Mogato, 2003).

To attract foreign finance, the CPP-NPA, through the NDFP, attempted to establish working relations with the Workers Party of Korea; the Habash, Jebril, and Hawatmeh (Maoist) factions of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO); the Japanese Red Army (JRA); the Nicaraguan Sandinistas; the Communist Party of El Salvador; the Peruvian Communist Party; and the Algerian military. Some of these groups reportedly provided financial aid, arms, training, or other types of support to the NPA. Front trading companies were allegedly set up in Hong Kong, Belgium, and Yugoslavia. The CPP-NPA also explored solidarity work with Albania, Libya, Tunisia, Tanzania, Poland, Vietnam, Bulgaria, Romania, Algeria, Panama, Peru, Brazil, and Cuba. The CPP established a unit in the Netherlands and sent representatives to Germany, France, Italy, Greece, Ireland, United States, Sweden, and the Middle East. Most of its foreign support was cut following the CPP split in 1992 and the collapse of Communism worldwide. Even before the split, its trading companies abroad collapsed because of external pressures (Revolutionary Workers Party, 1999). China's overt support ended in 1976, while aid from the Netherlands ceased in 1993 (Dawson, 1993).

## Military activities

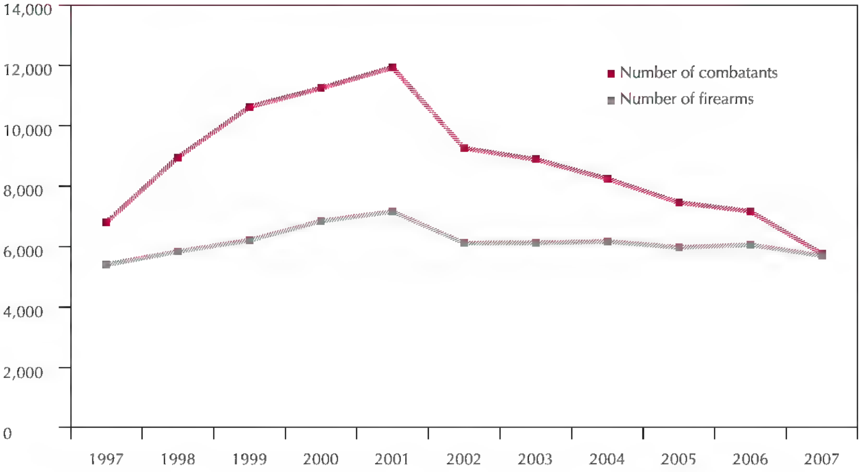
### Size and strength

According to military estimates, in 2006 there were 7,260 members (down from a 2004 estimate of 8,000–9,000) carrying 6,050 firearms, of whom 85 per cent are loyal to Sison (Esperon, 2006; Bordadora, 2006b). The CPP claimed in March 2007 that it had 12,000 fully-armed soldiers in 130 guerrilla fronts in 70 of 79 provinces (Scarpello, 2007). Both estimates are inflated, according to one former rebel, who puts the total figure at fewer than 4,800 members, typically only 30–40 fighters for each of the 120 fronts that the CPP-NPA claims.[4]

The AFP estimates the NPA's peak strength to have been 25,200 in 1987, although former NDFP leader Satur Ocampo said the NPA numbered only 7,000 nationwide in 1987 (Esperon, 2006; Tubeza, 2006). According to the AFP, 1988 signalled the first decline in NPA ranks for 12 years, a downward trend that continued steadily through the early 1990s to a low of around 6,000 in 1994–95 with 5,298 firearms in 445 'influenced' barangays. The decline was influenced by internal purges (Agence France Presse, 2003; Esperon, 2006). A subsequent steady increase, partly due to the CPP's ability to consolidate and expand after the 1992 split, its ability to raise funds through revolutionary

Figure 11.1

**CPP-NPA combatant and firearms strength, 1997–2007**



**Source:** Figures from AFP Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, J2; graph by South–South Network.

taxes, the opportunities provided by the party list system, and the Asian financial crises of the 1990s, led to a 2001–02 estimate of 11,000–12,000 guerillas with 7,159 firearms on 100 guerilla fronts (Agence France Presse, 2003; Esperon, 2006).[5] By 2004, there were reportedly 8,240 guerillas with 6,162 firearms operating on 106 guerilla fronts (Esperon, 2006).[6]

The CPP states it is developing the 'middle phase of the strategic defensive through guerilla warfare' and anticipates the 'advanced substage' (CPP, 2005). The number of armed NPA encounters during the Arroyo administration (315 as of 2005) is higher than any other post-Marcos regime (PHDR, 2005, p. 4).

## Command and control

*Military leadership*. The National Military Commission was for some time headed by Leo Velasco—an apparent victim of enforced disappearance in 2007—and the National Finance Commission by Wilma Tiamzon, according to military sources. Both commissions are subsumed within the Executive Committee.

*Military organization*. The NPA defers to the CPP's leadership and guidance under the principles 'the Party commands the gun' and 'politics in command'. It is controlled by three organizational pillars: the CPP's Central Committee, the National Operational Command of the NPA, and the NDFP's National Council.

The NPA is generally organized into highly mobile armed propaganda units of between 8 and 15 guerrillas called *Sandatahang Yunit Pampropaganda* (SYPs), which operate around the guerilla fronts. SYPs specialize in opening up new areas and expanding existing ones in guerilla zones. This organizational structure brings a notable degree of discipline to NPA ranks. SYPs are grouped to form the largest NPA units called the *Regular na Puwersang Makilos* (regular mobile force), which range from platoon- to company-sized units of 50–100 armed fighters that manoeuvre mainly within NPA base areas. These units act as the NPA's standing army, are equipped with the best weapons, and specialize primarily in military operations. The NPA has been discouraged from grouping in larger battalions to avoid becoming easy military targets. The rebel group occasionally organizes armed city 'sparrow' units of three to five men specializing in high-profile liquidation and assassination operations against targets they consider traitors or enemies of their cause (Corpus, 1989).

## Control

Theoretically, political control lies with the CPP's 26-member Central Committee, overseen by the eight-member politburo said to be directed by Sison from the Netherlands. There is a high degree of tactical autonomy across the NPA's individual fronts in the Philippines, and, because communication is often difficult, units need to be self-reliant both logistically and financially. Not all NPA regulars are Party members, but are subject to the Party's ideological control and discipline.

NPA guerrillas undergo ideological and political training, including a course in the Comprehensive Agreement to Respect Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL), which was signed by both the government and the rebel group in 1998. They also undergo combat skills training, taught mainly by veteran guerillas. NPA guerillas are required to adhere to Mao Zedong's 'Three Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Points of Attention', requiring rebel soldiers 'to always take the interest of the people at heart and to refrain from any action that may harm them' (Mao Tsetung, 1976). Average combat experience of fighters is not known but may range from a few months for the new 'intake' to about 30 years.

## Areas of operation

The NPA is spread across the Philippines and was present on nearly every island of the archipelago in 2005. Reflecting the group's 1990s resurgence, from 1996 to 2002 the NPA increased the proportion of villages in which it was active from 1 per cent to 5 per cent (Szajkowski, 2004, p. 406). In 2006, the NPA claimed to have 120 guerilla fronts in 800 municipalities in 70 out of 79 provinces. The NPA strongholds are in Luzon, Visayas, and Southern Tagalog. Sparrow units killed some 70 police in Davao City in Mindanao from 1983 to 1984 (Szajkowski, 2004, p. 405).

## Strategy and tactics

The NPA's main strategy is the Maoist 'protracted people's war', primarily waged by guerilla warfare in the countryside. Tactics include 'annihilation' and 'attrition' to seize weapons, sniping and harassment of army brigades, taking 'prisoners of war', and destroying communications and power infrastructure. Other NPA tactics are the assassination of military and police officers and politicians accused of crime, corruption, and counter-insurgency. US security forces and drug traffickers have also been attacked. In the 1980s, urban-based 'sparrow' assassination units often carried out these assassinations (Rutten, 2008, p. 56).

### Collaboration with other armed groups

The CPP-NPA's tactics were altered by the movement's split in 1992 into Sison's 'reaffirmist' faction (RA) and the 'rejectionist' (RJ) faction, which rejected the rural-based protracted people's war strategy, preferring the formation of larger company- and battalion-sized units and urban insurrectionism (see Chapter 1). The RJs formed several new parties with corresponding armed groups (see profiles of breakaway Communist groups).

The NPA's loose tactical alliance with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in Mindanao and an increase in tactical cooperation with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has been noted, but the NPA has yet to organize joint operations with either organization. Most of the support offered by the MNLF and MILF takes the form of safe passage through the territory these groups control. But, after the 1996 Final Peace Agreement of the MNLF with the Philippine government, the CPP considered the MNLF to have betrayed the Moro struggle. In 1999, the NDFP formalized its tactical alliance with the MILF, still primarily to avoid confrontations in the field and limited to defence of common areas (see MILF Profile).

## Small arms and light weapons

The CPP, NPA, and NDFP website is a primary source of information on the types of weapons utilized by the NPA. It uses the same types of weapon as the AFP—said to be its main source, through raids, ambushes, encounters, and purchases. The CPP claims it has recovered the following weapons in ambushes or attacks on government forces: M16 assault rifles, M14 rifles, .357 magnum revolvers, 9 mm pistols, .38 pistols, super .38 pistols, .40 pistols, .22 pistols, RPGs, RPG-2 anti-tank grenade launchers, and M203 underbarrel grenade launchers (40 mm). Other weapons reported by military and other sources to be in the NPA inventory include: 5.56 mm M4, 5.56 mm AR15, .30 M1 Garand and M1 and M2 carbines, 7.62 mm Galil rifle (small numbers), 7.62 mm AK47 (small numbers), .50 Browning M2 heavy machine gun (few in number and rarely used owing to lack of ammunition), 7.62 M60 general purpose machine gun .30 M1918 Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR, large numbers), 40 mm M79 grenade launcher, .45 Thompson sub-machine gun, .45 M10 Ingram sub-machine gun, 9 mm Uzi sub-machine gun, .30 M1903 Springfield rifle, .22 hunting rifles, factory-manufactured and craft shotguns, and miscellaneous hand guns, including .22, .38, and .45 Colts and 9 mm Barettas (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007).

The NPA manufactures and uses command-detonated anti-tank mines for targeting military vehicles. There are no reports of factory-made mines, though the AFP reports the seizures of Claymores among other explosive devices from the NPA (International Campaign to Ban Landmines, 2006, pp. 600–08). Given that the Philippines signed and ratified the Mine Ban Treaty in 2000 and that the AFP announced in 1998 that it had disposed of its entire arsenal of 2,460 Claymore mines, these NPA mines are likely to be locally manufactured improvised explosive devices (IEDs) rather than military munitions acquired on the black market. The NPA commonly uses IEDs for attacking telecommunications towers and other commercial targets owned by companies that have refused to pay 'revolutionary taxes' (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007). In 2004, the NPA stated that it was 'trying to develop the ability to make and use the weapons that the Iraqi resistance is now using . . . rocket-propelled grenades, improvised explosive devices, mortars and other close range weapons', a claim the AFP has dismissed (CPP, 2004; Gomez, 2005).

There have been no reports of the Philippine security forces ever having come under attack by NPA units using either mortars or rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). The fact that RPGs have not been used in attacks is almost certainly due to a lack of ammunition (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007). Similarly, deployment of the few .50 M2 heavy machine guns in the NPA inventory is likely to be constrained by lack of ammunition. Both .50 heavy machine guns and M60 general purpose machine guns have occasionally been deployed in recent years against security force helicopters, most recently in clashes in Quezon province in November 2005 (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007).

## Sources

Most NPA weapons are accumulated through the regular ambush and removal of weapons from security forces, especially from the police and the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU), the civilian militia. Another source of small arms is local politicians who hand over weapons as a form of 'donation' or taxation if they want to campaign in an area where the NPA is strong. Weapons are also reportedly offered by, and purchased at low prices from, military officials. Sources interviewed in 2006 claimed that explosions and fires inside military camps were purposely set to cover up the loss of firearms.[7]

The NPA receives little foreign support for arms. China was reported to have provided external support to the NPA from its inception until 1976, and Dutch funding agencies may also have supported front organizations without direct knowledge that funding went to the CPP-NPA. Attempts at smuggling Chinese weapons by sea in the early 1970s failed.[8] The use of any Communist weapons that may have been acquired from China and Vietnam at this time is limited by the difficulty of acquiring 7.62 mm Kalashnikov ammunition in the Philippines (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007). Given the conspicuous absence of Communist-bloc weaponry in NPA ranks, it is unlikely that the NPA ever acquired arms from the regional black market hub on the Cambodia–Thailand border (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007).

There is little in the way of front-to-front transfers of weapons, which reflects the necessarily self-sufficient nature of each front. Each front acquires its own weapons independently through ambushes, encounters, raids, 'taxation' of politicians, and outright purchases. The NPA claims to manufacture many of its own explosives. The military has also reportedly armed indigenous communities in Mindanao (Zonio and Tupas, 2006).

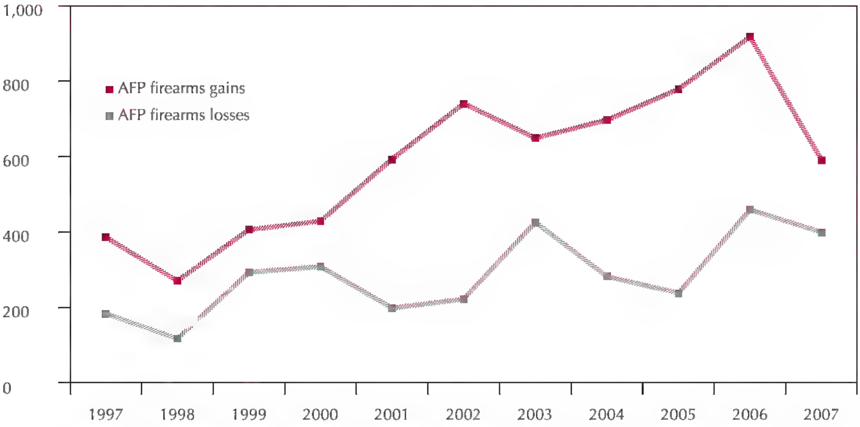
## Recoveries

The government's *Balik-baril* ('Return Gun') programme has been largely unsuccessful (see Chapters 6 and 10).

In addition, the military recovers weapons and improvised landmines in encounters, raids, ambushes, captures of NPA camps, and when rebels are apprehended or surrender. Among the weapons recovered in March 2006 were M16 and M1 Garand rifles, US carbines, Springfields, a .30 machine gun, and

Figure 11.2

**Firearms gained and lost by the AFP from the CPP-NPA, 1997–2007**



**Source:** Figures from AFP Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, J2; graph by South–South Network.

one D57RR anti-tank weapon (5th CRG News; *Sun Star Bacolod*, 2006). From 1996 to 2002, the AFP reported more gains than losses of firearms through seizures and rebels surrenders (see below).

## Human security issues

### Human rights abuses

The CPP has admitted killing former comrades, which it justifies on the grounds that they are 'traitors' and 'criminals' (Rosal, 2003). The NPA has also been accused by former comrades of human rights abuses during the 'anti-infiltration' campaigns in the 1980s. It has since publicly apologized for the purges, though victims and relatives say little has been done in terms of seeking truth and reparations (Garcia, Mercado, and Mercado, 2004).

The NDFP says it is committed to following the Geneva Conventions and, in 1998, signed the CARHRIHL. A 2006 report on the CARHRIHL attributed 106 human rights violations to the NPA; this compares with 693 that were blamed on government forces (Bordadora, 2006a). The NPA has rejected the accusation that it targeted government forces involved in rescue operations around Mayon volcano in August 2006.

## Displacement

More than one million people were displaced by the conflict between the AFP and the NPA from 1986 to 1992, mainly due to major offensives launched by government (PHDR, 2005, pp. 9–10). Since then there have been regular reports of families fleeing their homes because of clashes between the security forces and the NPA. Tribes in the Sierra Madre mountains were displaced in 2006 (Mallari, 2006b). In October 2006, more than 5,000 people fled their homes in Calatrava, Negros Occidental province, following counter-insurgency operations against NPA rebels (DSWD, 2006).

## Children affiliated with fighting forces

Prior to 2000, the military estimated that 270–300 children made up 3 per cent of the NPA's regular fighters and a quarter of NPA recruits (Makinano, 2001, p. 83). According to a 2003 military report, 122 boys and 50 girls as young as 13 were working with the NPA in various capacities when captured between 1997 and 2003 (PHRIC, 2005, pp. xxix–xxx).

The NPA says it now limits its membership to physically and mentally fit persons over 18 years old, though it has used minors in the past.[9] Underage children or relations of full-time NPA members in the 'war zones' continue to serve as messengers, runners, and assistants. The NPA teaches literacy, numeracy, and politics to these children, who often have little access to public school education because of the distance from the schools and their parents' need for farm labour. Because of their constant exposure to the rebel group, these children easily qualify as commanders when they turn 18 and are allowed to become combatants.[10]

## Gender

The CPP-NPA-NDFP formally advocates gender equality, accepts gay relations and same-sex marriage, and prohibits exploitation in heterosexual and homosexual relationships in a policy document entitled 'On the Proletarian Relationship of Sexes'. Women hold positions as guerrilla leaders and combatants in the NPA, and many of the present party secretaries are women. The NPA organizes women as a distinct sector in its territories; gender education is prominent in training modules for its mass organizations, army, and party.

Women activists have, however, claimed that the movement tends to replicate patriarchal relations in relationships and families, with women taking on the double burden of revolutionary and household, child-rearing, and even emotional work (Lansang, 1991, pp. 40–52). Homophobic tendencies in the movement have been alleged.

## Outlook

### Capacity for negotiation

The NPA's capacity to negotiate is limited by its avowal to pursue a protracted people's war with the aim of overthrowing the government and replacing it with a Maoist governance structure. Nevertheless, it has demonstrated its ability to commit to a ceasefire by agreeing to suspend hostilities against Philippine and US military troops helping villagers affected by natural disasters and observing Christmas truces between 2000 and 2004 (Labalan et al., 2006). It rejected the government's truce declarations in 2005 and 2006 (Mallari et al., 2005; Mallari, 2006a). Past attempts to find a negotiated solution to the CPP-NPA conflict with the Philippine government have been generally led by the united front organization of the CPP, namely, the NDFP.

NDFP negotiations at The Hague, Netherlands, came to a productive head in March 1998 with a comprehensive agreement on human rights and international humanitarian law. Ceasefire talks during the 1980s and 1990s were scuttled for various reasons, including the massacre of peasants and the assassination of a labour leader by the government as well as the assassination of a government official, two congressmen, and a provincial mayor by the NPA. In 1998, Arroyo signed a Visiting Forces Agreement (still in operation) with the United States, which damaged the peace process (Bagayaua, 2002, pp. 12–13). A 2004 ceasefire with accompanying peace negotiations broke down early that year, because the NDFP believed the Arroyo government had pushed for the United States to add the NPA to its list of terrorist groups in 2002. Norway is currently playing third-party facilitator in the peace talks.

Sporadic attacks on both infrastructure and government security forces continue. The recent killings with impunity by death squads of hundreds of noncombatants suspected of supporting the CPP-NPA, allegedly unleashed by the government, have hurt prospects of future peace talks (AI, 2006).

## Prospects for the future

Peace talks are unlikely in the near future. President Arroyo has given the AFP PHP 1 billion (USD 22 million) to crush the insurgency by 2010. The chances are slim of it eradicating the decades-old, deep-rooted insurgency within the next few years; but neither is the NPA likely to be able to expand its territories sufficiently from the rural areas to surround the cities from the countryside before the end of the decade (Caouette, 2004; Abinales, 1996, p. 26; 2005, p. 36).[11]

## Endnotes

1 The *Philippine Human Development Report 2005* puts the number at 3,552 injured and killed in the conflict with the NPA from 1986 to 2004 (PHDR, 2005, p. 4). Szajkowski (2004) puts the total at 40,000 killed from 1969 to 2004, though it is not clear how this number was determined.

2 This information is also contained in Jane's Strategic Advisory Services (2007).

3 Baladad (2004) shows that the average rebel returnee is a male of peasant origin, married, with some elementary school education, who joined the underground in his early twenties, stayed in the NPA for around eight years, and left because of the hardship of life, family concerns, and the AFP programme for surrenderees.

4 Former rebel, Gil Navarro, a member of the Peace Advocates for Truth, Justice, and Healing, was interviewed on 3 April 2007.

5 Comment to the author by Ed Quitoriano, who questions the supposed relation between Asia's financial crisis and the growth of the NPA.

6 AFP Statistics, provided by Raymund Quilop, May 2006. Quilop also reported that in 2002 there were 8,600 NPA combatants, 5,800 of them armed.

7 Separate interviews with former Bicol Regional Party Committee head Sotero Llamas, Tabaco, Albay, 5 March 2006, and Gregorio Bañares, NDFP Bicol spokesman, Camarines Sur, 3–4 June 2006.

8 The 'Karagatan' arms landing is one example. See Gloria (2002, p. 17). Former Bicol Regional Party Committee (BRPC) head Sotero Llamas has said that several attempted arms landings were intercepted by US Sikorsky helicopters in the 1970s and 1980s.

9 Author interview with Bañares, June 2006.

10 Interviews with key informants Ka Diego and Pastor Simon.

11 This is the opinion not only of political analysts but also of some sources in the military, anti-Communist civilians, and the Catholic clergy. See, for example, Doronila (2006) and David (2006).

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## CHAPTER 12

# Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas (Revolutionary Workers Party of the Philippines) and its Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPM-P/RPA-ABB)

## Overview

The Revolutionary Proletarian Army–Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPA-ABB) of the Revolutionary Workers Party-Philippines (RPMP/RPA-ABB) is one of the most prominent groups of the 'rejectionist' strand of the Communist insurgency in the Philippines (the other strand being the 'reaffirmists' led by Jose Maria Sison, described in the CPP-NPA profile in Chapter 11). A product of the merger of the two distinct groups that make up its name, the RPA-ABB has been accused of playing a paramilitary role associated, according to some rumours, with the Philippine National Police (PNP) and, according to others, with local politicians (Zuasola, 2003, p. A18; CDI, 2004). The group denies this, claiming it has instead shifted away from armed struggle to focus on political work.[1] The ABB, though not the RPA, was added to the US State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) in December 2001 (US Department of State, 2007). The RPMP/RPA-ABB signed a peace pact with the government in December 2000.[2] It continues to clash with the NPA.

## Basic characteristics

### Typology

While originally an urban CPP-NPA hit-squad, the ABB in its new alliance with the rural-based RPA serves as the armed wing of the Marxist-Leninist Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa-Pilipinas (The Revolutionary Worker's Party in the Philippines or RPM-P).

## Current status

The RPA-ABB is active, but currently maintains a ceasefire with the government. The RPM-P says it retains its armed force for self-defence, but has not expanded its military capability since it prioritizes political work with its mass base over armed struggle (Madarang, 2004).[3] It continues to recruit political activists, including among the now defunct Red Vigilante Group, which broke away from the NPA in Nueva Ecija (RPM-P, 2006). The peace pact has given some respite to the RPA-ABB. Nevertheless, the government has not fulfilled its promises to drop charges against RPA-ABB leaders and issue special permits to carry 100 handguns for self-defence.[4] The group says some of its members who were issued 'safe conduct passes' have been imprisoned, tortured, and harassed (RPMP, 2006). The government offered the group funding for reintegration and development projects under the framework of the 2000 Peace Agreement, but it has failed to deliver fully on the funding pledge (see 'Sources of Financing and Support,' below).[5] The RPA-ABB's rhetoric is often directed against forces of 'globalization', and it is critical of the US-led occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Given the ongoing clashes between the RPA-ABB and the CPP-NPA, critics from the Catholic church view the peace agreement as an anti-NPA counterinsurgency tool that could be manipulated to promote 'vested political and business interests, primarily those associated with Eduardo Cojuangco, Jr.', the landlord and politician who served as intervener for the peace process (Parreño, 2002, pp. 26–27).[6] The critics also warn against the transformation of the group into a state paramilitary force (Zuasola, 2003, pp. A1, A18; Parreño, 2002). The group denies that a single RPA-ABB member was integrated into the armed forces or police, and dismisses the allegations as propaganda instigated by the CPP-NPA and its allies.[7]

## Origins

The RPMP-RPA emerged from the split in the Maoist CPP in the early 1990s. The group, based primarily in Visayas and Mindanao, held its first congress in May 1998, its second in 2004, and its third in July 2007.

The Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB) was formed on 6 April 1986, initially the urban guerilla unit of the CPP-NPA in Manila (RPM-P, 2004a).[8] Its formation was a response to the 9th CPP Central Committee's Resolution to include urban partisan warfare as a component of the Advance Stage of Strategic Defensive of the Protracted People's War (RPM-P, 2004a). This viewpoint was espoused by the Manila-Rizal Regional Party Committee of the CPP headed by the late Filemon 'Popoy' Lagman (Parreño, 1997a, pp. 1, 5). The ABB's period of peak activity was in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when it killed over 200 people (police, government officials, ideological opponents, business leaders, and, occasionally, foreigners).[9] Most of the ABB's operations were in metropolitan Manila. The group takes its name from a labour leader who went underground in the late 1970s fighting in the NPA ranks (CDI, 2004).

The ABB remained under the umbrella of the CPP-NPA until the big split in the early 1990s, when it followed Lagman and the Manila-Rizal Committee in breaking away after Sison advocated a return to rural-based warfare. Early in 1997, Nilo de la Cruz (*nom de guerre* Sergio Romero) wrested control of the ABB from Lagman, by that time a labour union organizer. De la Cruz split from the Manila-Rizal Committee and in March 1997 brokered an alliance with another group of former CPP rejectionists, the Revolutionary Proletarian Army (RPA), led by Arturo Tabara, the former head of the CPP-NPA's Visayas Commission (Viscom). The leaders of the new RPA-ABB alliance established a political wing, Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas (RPM-P), with Tabara as chairman (Parreño, 1997a; 1997b; Bayoran, 1998). The group now included 'almost the whole [NPA] army of WV [Western Visayas], the whole [NPA] army of CMR [the Central Mindanao Region] and the whole organization of the Alex Boncayao Brigade [ABB]' (RPM-P, 2004b).[10] The RPA had proclaimed itself the 'new revolutionary army in Negros island' earlier in April 1996 (Gomez, 1996, p. 13). The group expanded into Nueva Ecija, where it absorbed an oversized platoon that split from the NPA. Former members of the ABB bloc returned with their weapons. They set up undersized platoons among the Lumad (non-Muslim indigenous people in Mindanao) and in Agusan, but dissolved a partisan unit in Davao because of security problems. They maintained their forces on Negros island and Panay, and started organizing in Capiz (RPM-P, 2004a).

The current peace agreement with the Philippine government allows the RPA-ABB to operate legally (Madarang, 2004), though some of its officials continue in detention or face criminal charges (RPM-P, 2006). The Central Mindanao Region eventually split from this group to form the RPMM/RPA (see Chapter 13).

## Aims and ideology

The ABB and the RPA—the armed forces under the RPM-P's political command—have rejected the 'vulgarized application' of Marxism-Leninism of the CPP-NPA, its protracted people's war strategy, and its 'Stalinist' tendencies (RPM-P, 2004c). They believe in the primacy of the 'mass movement' over armed struggle (Parreño, 2002). The ABB, originally the urban armed partisan unit of the CPP-NPA's Manila-Rizal committee, aimed to conduct urban guerrilla warfare in the national capital region of Manila in conjunction with the guerilla warfare by the NPA in the countryside.

In 2004, the RPA-ABB reportedly put up its own candidates for election in Ilocos Sur, with the stated aim of ending elitist rule, warlordism, and corruption. Proving that they retained their militant nature, the group threatened reprisals for any improprieties perpetrated by rival candidates (Madarang, 2004).

## Leadership

Arturo Tabara was assassinated by the NPA in September 2004 in Quezon City, Metro Manila, allegedly for counter-insurgency and criminal activities (Ombion, 2004) and for his public criticism of the Communists (Andrade, 2005). Lagman was assassinated by unknown assailants in 2001. Members of both the CPP-NPA and RPA-ABB were among the suspects.

The group has split over the competing leadership claims of party leader Nilo de la Cruz, a former head of the ABB and co-founder of the RPM-P, and Carapali Lualhati (Stephen Paduano), the RPA-ABB National Commander and RPM-P vice-chairman. In June 2007, De la Cruz expelled Paduano, Veronica Tabara—RPM-P secretary general and widow of the assassinated former chairman—and Ariel Sabandar, the head of the Mindanao command, for turning their troops into guns for hire, for corruption, and for 'intrigue'. Claiming to represent the majority in the rebel group, Paduano and his allies responded by expelling De la Cruz and eight other members of the RPM-P Central

Committee (Gomez, 2007b). The Paduano faction has named Fidel Nava (pseudonym) the new RPM-P chair (Gomez, 2007c).

## Support

### Political base

The RPA-ABB bows to the RPM-P's political leadership.[11]

Electoral party list Alab Katipunan (AK, formerly ATIN), which fielded candidates in 2004 but won no seats in congress, is identified with the group (Leftist Parties of the World, 2004; PHDR, 2005, p. 91). Notably, Alab Katipunan garnered 6 per cent of the vote in Western Visayas, the RPMP's bailiwick, but gained few votes in other regions (Commission on Elections, 2005).

### Combatants and constituency

The RPM-P states that the majority of its recruits are peasants and 'semi-proletariat' (members of the informal economy) who joined because of hardship and exploitation. It claims to have local support in its areas of operation among the peasantry of Negros Island and Panay. It also claims the support of workers' organizations in all the areas where they operate. The ABB said it had 5,000 cadres before it seceded from the CPP (Coronel-Ferrer, 1997, p. 212).

### Sources of financing and support

The peace deal established with the government has given the RPA-ABB new ways of accumulating funds. In 2006, Arroyo gave PHP 2.1 million (USD 40,000) to RPM-P representative Veronica Mondejar for the group's livelihood fund (Gomez, 2006, p. A19).[12] The government had earlier pledged PHP 510 million (USD 10 million) funding in three years for development projects in 150 poor barangays identified by the rebel group, as part of the peace deal (Bayoran, 1998).[13] By 2006, however, only PHP 6.6 million (USD 125,000) had been delivered.[14] Military and police sources state that the RPA-ABB tried to extort money from candidates and harass barangay leaders and villagers to support certain candidates during the 2007 elections (Burgos, 2007). The leadership publicly rejects the practice of 'revolutionary taxation'—demanding money from local businesses and wealthy residents (Parreño, 1997b, pp. 1, 5).[15]

## Military activities

### Size and strength

A 2003 estimate put the RPA-ABB's membership at fewer than 1,000 fighters, most of them in Negros, with 200 armed combatants in the Davao provinces of Mindanao (Zuasola, 2003, pp. A1, A18). In 2002, the group stated that it had more than 1,000 armed fighters throughout the country (Parreño, 2002, p. 26). It had previously claimed to have four battalions (Nava, 2000, pp. 6–7) with 600 armed fighters in Negros island alone in 1998 (Bayoran, 1998, p. 4). When it broke away from the CPP in 1993, the Negros Island Regional Party Committee said it had the support of 1,800 party members, four NPA companies, a mass base of 36,000 members, and 570 high-powered rifles (Coronel-Ferrer, 1997, p. 213). The RPM-P reported a weakening of its forces in the late 1990s, leaving it with only small armed propaganda units instead of fully-fledged guerrilla units.[16]

### Command and control

Party leader Nilo de la Cruz and National Commander Carapali Lualhati (Stephen Paduano) both claim leadership of the RPM-P. The RPA-ABB sponsored intelligence training and 'Basic Partisan Training' in 1998 and 2002 for their armed groups (RPM-P, 2004a).

### Areas of operation

Based mainly on Negros island in the Visayas, the RPA-ABB has a foothold in Panay in the Visayas and the Davao provinces in Mindanao (Zuasola, 2003).[17] In 2000, the group claimed to operate in ten provinces and six cities among the Moro people and the Lumads, and in eight provinces and 11 cities and several towns in the Visayas (Nava, 2000, pp. 6–7). The government office in charge of the peace process is monitoring some of the group's projects in Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, the Negros islands, Panay Island, Compostela Valley, Agusan del Sur, Davao, Camarines Sur, and Metro Manila.[18] The group has also operated in Bukidnon (RPM-P, 2006). In 2003, RPA-ABB Commander Lualhati stated that the RPA-ABB did not control any areas, but only had areas of influence (Dumalag, 2003).

## Strategy and tactics

The group claimed responsibility for the attacks in 1999 and 2000 on the Manila and Negros Oriental offices of Shell Oil and Petron, as well as on the office of the Energy Regulatory Board, in protest against spiralling oil prices. It also attacked the Department of Foreign Affairs office to protest the Philippines–US Visiting Forces Agreement, and the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency. The rebels launched an operation against illegal drugs in Nueva Ecija and claimed to do police work in their areas of operation (RPM-P, 2004a).

The RPA-ABB's reported attacks on Citibank and the US Department of Energy served as catalysts for the group's inclusion on the US State Department's Terrorist Exclusion List in 2001 (CDI, 2004). Since 1995, the RPM-P has adopted a newer platform of anti-globalization and workers' rights (Nava, 2000), playing down armed struggle, and focusing on political work and peace talks.

## Collaboration and friction with other armed groups

Relations between the RPA-ABB and the CPP-NPA are extremely hostile and marked by desultory warfare (Ombion, 2004; Gomez, 2007d). The RPA-ABB accuses the CPP-NPA of being a 'pseudo Marxist terrorist organization' that practices extortion (Dumalag, 2003; RPM-P, n.d.), and has called on its members to prevent the NPA from 'gaining ground in our areas or in new areas' (RPM-P, 2004e). The CPP-NPA for its part views the RPA-ABB as government collaborators who have linked up with big landlords and local politicians to engage in criminal activities. Concerned non-aligned individuals state that the RPA-ABB joins the military in its operations against the NPA. There were skirmishes between the two armed groups—initiated by both sides—in Negros Occidental, Negros Oriental, and Antique from 2000 to 2002 (RPM-P, 2004a; Gomez 2005a; 2005b). Friction was heightened by reports of two planned assassination attempts on Sison in collaboration with the Estrada government in 2000 (Ombion, 2004).

In 2002, the RPM-P's allies in Mindanao seceded because of ideological and other differences to form their own Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Mindanao (see Chapter 13).

## Small arms and light weapons

### Stockpiles

The bulk of the RPA-ABB's firearms were brought with them when they split from the mainstream NPA, though some weapons are purchased on the informal market or stolen from security forces. The RPA-ABB arsenal is likely to include a variety of rifles such as 5.56 mm M16s, 7.62 mm M14s and older .30 M1 Garands, as well as grenades (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007).

### Recovered weapons

The RPA-ABB has not surrendered its weapons. The peace pact with the government allows the group to keep at least 100 handguns with special licences, though no licences have yet been issued to anyone in the group.[19]

The RPM-P also reported violations of the ceasefire, stating that the arresting authorities had seized the following weapons from them in seven separate incidents since 2002: four .45, one .38, and one .357 handgun; four home-made .38 revolvers and bullets, five shotguns, two home-made shotguns, one carbine, one M79 rifle, six hand grenades, three rifle grenades, two baby Armalite rifles, 171 pieces of ammunition (80 bullets shotgun, 90 bullets carbine, and one bullet M79), one 12-gauge shotgun, one Super 38 Pistol with 14 rounds of ammunition, one US MI carbine rifle with 59 rounds of ammunition, one 8 M16 Armalite rifle and 31 rounds of ammunition, one M14 rifle, a 12-gauge shotgun (single shot) with two rounds of ammunition, one 12-gauge shotgun rifle with six rounds ammunition, a 9 mm pistol, a .22 handgun, and hundreds of assorted bullets (RPM-P, 2006; Burgos 2007). The group also reported that the NPA had seized at least 20 high-powered rifles from them in two separate raids in 2001 and 2004 (RPM-P, 2004a).

## Human security issues

### Children affiliated with fighting forces

In February 2005, RPA-ABB National Commander Carapali Lualhati declared the group's opposition to the use of children as soldiers (Andag et. al., 2005, pp. 162–63). The RPA-ABB has been accused of recruiting children in the past (Gloria, 2005).

### Human rights

The group has been accused of extortion and harassment of NGO workers and other civilians (Parreño, 2002, p. 26). Other human rights abuses such as murder, arson, rape, and harassment are detailed by the human rights group Karapatan (Ombion, 2004). The RPMP-RPA denies these accusations, which it says are spread by the CPP-NPA and its allies.[20]

### Gender

The group considers the women's movement to be integrated with the workers' movement and states that a fifth of the members during its Second Congress in 2004 were women cadres with responsibilities in various territorial party bodies (RPM-P, 2004d).

## Outlook

### Capacity for negotiations

The RPA-ABB's political wing, the RPM-P, is the conduit for peace talks. Previous talks with the Estrada government resulted in a peace deal that was finalized with the Arroyo government in 2000. The rebel group has protested against the government's failure to keep its part of the peace deal, though it has said on numerous occasions that it remains hopeful that the government will honour the provisions of the peace pact.[21] A Joint Enforcement and Monitoring Committee was set up in 2001 to oversee the ceasefire.

In 2002, the group signed the revised and expanded Deed of Commitment under the Geneva Call for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action (PSIO, 2006, p. 68).

### Prospects for the future

The government is taking steps to fast-track the peace pact with the RPMP-RPA-ABB. It reported the release of a PHP 20 million (USD 382,000) tranche for development projects and dropped charges against two RPA-ABB national leaders in January 2006 (OPAPP, 2006).[22] Some critics of the peace deal say it could end up propping up the group by granting members special permits to carry firearms and giving formal recognition to the RPA-ABB's control over areas where it has influence. The group says it is forging alliances with other opposition forces to oust President Arroyo, change the elitist system of government, and build a transitional revolutionary government.[23]

## Endnotes

1 Interview with Nilo de la Cruz, founder and leader of the Rebolusyonaryong Partido Ng Manggagawa-Pilipinas, Manila, 26 June, 2006 and 30 March 2007.

2 Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa-Pilipinas/Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPMP/RPA-ABB). Signed in December 2000 by Edgardo J. Angara and Nilo de la Cruz, chairmen of the government and RPMP/RPA-ABB peace panels, respectively. See RPMP (2000).

3 See RPM-P document 'On Armed Struggle', available at <http://www.angelfire.com/rpg2/rpmp/oas.htm>.

4 Interview with De la Cruz and RPMP (2006).

5 Interview with De la Cruz.

6 Among the critical documents from the Catholic Church are a 'Backgrounder on the Proposed Supplementary Agreement of the Negros Peace Congress' and 'GRP-RPMP/RPA/ABB Peace Agreement: Mga Panghuna-huna sang Pamuluyo bahin sa Pipila ka mga Provisions Sini' (Citizens' Reflections on Some Provisions), derived from the results of a pre-Negros Peace Congress consultation, November–December 2001 in <http://peace process/rpa/pre-congress/issues & concerns/030202>. Two other press statements were released, the first by Bishop of Bacolod Vicente M. Navarra in January 2002, and the second by three bishops and a diocesan administrator criticizing the peace agreement, warning that it could be used to promote 'vested political and business interests, primarily those associated with Eduardo Cojuangco, Jr.'

7 Interview with De la Cruz.

8 Bayoran (1998, p. 4) states that the ABB started in 1985 in Metro Manila.

9 The rebel group claimed responsibility for the killing in 1996 of Colonel Rolando Abadilla among others, for whom five suspects have been reportedly wrongly convicted. The so-called 'Abadilla 5' remain in jail.

10 Not all of the members of the ABB joined the RPA: one 'bloc' refused to join Nilo de la Cruz, and in May 2000 Manila-based spokesperson of the ABB's national operation command, Pol Milendez, also denied any alliance with the RPA (Lacuarta, 2000, pp. 19–20).

11 See RPM-P website, <http://www.angelfire.com/rpg2/rpmp/>

12 US conversion rates at 1 June 2008 throughout this paragraph.

13 These figures also appear in a PowerPoint Presentation by the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process. 'The Peace Process Between the GRP & the RPMP/RPA/ABB,' given on 10 November 2006, p. 3.

14 Interview with De la Cruz.

15 Also mentioned by De la Cruz in an interview with the author.

16 See RPM-P document 'On Armed Struggle', available at <http://www.angelfire.com/rpg2/rpmp/oas.htm>.

17 RPMP (1999b) also mentions a meeting held by the group in Samar in 1995, while RPMP (2006) lists arrests in Metro Manila and Rizal.

18 General Secretariat Updates from January to June 2006, GRP-RPM-P/RPA/ABB. Provided by the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), 27 June 2006.

19 Interview with De la Cruz.

20 Interview with De la Cruz.

21 Letters from the RPMP/RPA-ABB to the Joint Enforcement and Monitoring Committee dated 13 August 2003, 13 November 2004, and 16 January 2005.

22 US conversion rates at 30 January 2006.

23 Interview with De la Cruz.

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# CHAPTER 13

# Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Mindanao (Revolutionary Workers Party of Mindanao) and its Revolutionary People's Army (RPMM/RPA)

## Overview

The Revolutionary Workers Party-Mindanao/Revolutionary Peoples' Army (RPMM/RPA) is one of the 'rejectionist' groups that make up one of the two strands of the Communist insurgency based mainly in Central Mindanao; the second strand is the 'reaffirmist' groups led by Jose Maria Sison (see Chapter 11). Founded in 2001, the RPMM/RPA is adhering to a formal ceasefire with the government while it negotiates a peace pact.

## Basic characteristics

### Typology

The RPMM/RPA profiles itself as a revolutionary group upholding the principles of Marxism-Leninism, but not Maoism.[1] It is currently pursuing legal methods of revolutionary struggle, but retains the option of armed struggle.[2]

### Current status

The RPMM/RPA is active, though it signed a formal ceasefire with the government in October 2005 pending the final signing of a peace pact (GRP, 2005). Formal peace talks have stagnated over the rebels' request to include environmental protection in the final peace agreement, though informal talks continue at the village level (see Box 1.2). The RPMM/RPA unilaterally suspended peace talks with the government in February 2006 after President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo declared a state of national emergency. In August

2006, the RPA attacked trucks used by loggers in Lumad areas. The military retaliated, reportedly using planes in the counter-attack.[3] The rebel group continues to organize and to expand, and to push the government on measures that it says will improve confidence in the people process, such as financing development projects in at least 100 marginalized barangays in Mindanao, fully implementing the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act, clearing dossiers on RPMM members, indemnifying victims of human rights violations, and providing assistance to internally displaced persons in Mindanao (RPMM, 2002c; 2006a).[4] The peace process is unusual in its focus on development and the wide consultation held in villages under the influence of the RPMM (see Box 1.2).

## Origins

The Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa-Mindanao (RPMM) was originally the Central Mindanao Regional (CMR) party committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA). Aside from its basic tasks of mass base building, agrarian reform, and armed struggle, the CMR was to develop alliances with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the indigenous peoples of Mindanao (RPMM, 2006a).

It was its work with indigenous communities that led the CMR committee to question the CPP, in particular its 'disregard of the democratic and ethnic question of the minority nationalities' and its position on the ancestral domain of ethnic groups as a problem to be resolved by class struggle (RPMM, 2006a). Party members also criticized the concept of a protracted people's war.

When the CPP-NPA split in the early 1990s, the Regional Party Committee opposed the reaffirmation by the CPP of the protracted people's war and of Jose Maria Sison as its leader. As a result, its leaders were branded counter-revolutionaries and expelled from the CPP late in 1993. It later allied with the Visayas Party Committee and part of the Manila-Rizal Committee to launch the 'rejectionist' Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa–Pilipinas (RPMP) in 1998. The armed wing of the RPMP is the Revolutionary Proletarian Army (RPA), which joined the Manila-based Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB) under Nilo de la Cruz (see Chapter 12).

On 1 May 2002, the central Mindanao group formally declared independence from its Visayan counterpart on the grounds that they were not consulted on the RPMP's peace pact with the government, as well as disagreements over leadership, accountability, democratic centralism, and other ideological issues (RPMM, 2002b). The RPMM renamed its armed group the Revolutionary Peoples' Army, to distinguish it from the RPMP's Revolutionary Proletarian Army.

### Aims and ideology

The RPMM/RPA is a Marxist-Leninist socialist group that rejects imperialism and monopoly capitalism. It eschews the CPP-NPA's analysis of the Philippines as a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society, arguing that it is now a capitalist country with 'a backward and very unevenly developed system' (RPMM, 2006a). It opposes the protracted people's war, which it argues 'dissipates the revolutionary energy of proletarian militants and revolutionaries' (RPMM, 2006a). Unlike the CPP-NPA, which still wants to seize state power, the RPMM/RPA has shifted to peace and development work (RPMM, n.d.) and has indicated a willingness to lay down arms to compete in electoral struggle.[5] It is open to allying itself with some of the more democratic groups of the revolutionary left if prospects for electoral success become more favourable (RPMM, 2002b).

### Leadership

Senior leader and political representative in the peace talks with the government is Enrique ('Ike') de los Reyes (Ermita, 2003). Anisa Bulosan is cited as the group's chairperson (DED, n.d.).

## Support

### Political base

The Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa-Mindanao is the political party that leads the RPA.

Party list group Anak Mindanao (AMIN)[6] is identified with the group (Leftist Parties of the World, 2004) and did well in North-eastern Mindanao and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, winning one seat in Congress,[7] though the controlling AMIN faction has been trying to disassociate itself from the group.

### Combatants and constituency

The combatants of the RPMM/RPA are former NPA guerillas, mostly peasant in origin, some of them belonging to Lumad (non-Muslim) indigenous tribes.

The group reportedly has the support of residents of 77 communities where it operates and has carried out consultations with the residents of 97 barangays within the framework of the peace process (see Box 1.2). The RPMM is sensitive to the 'tri-people' character of Mindanao and probably has the support of some Moro (Muslim tribes), Lumad, and Christian settlers (RPMM, c. 2003).

The group has been a member of the Fourth International since 2003. Other support, mainly for the peace talks, comes from local government and the Philippine NGO Balay Mindanaw. The national government pledged PHP 3.5 million pesos (USD 66,000) to the peace process.[8] Foreign donor agencies, specifically the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the German Development Service, are providing technical assistance for both the peace process and development projects.

## Military activities

### Size and strength

The RPMM claims to cover at least half of the Mindanao area, the other half being the territory of the NPA.[9]

### Command and control

The leader is Ike de los Reyes (nom de guerre Harry Tubongbanwa).

### Areas of operation

Based mainly in Central Mindanao, the RPMM/RPA has a presence in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Maguindanao, Lanao del Norte, the Agusan provinces, and Lumad areas within the tri-boundary of Misamis Oriental, Agusan del Norte, and Agusan del Sur.[10]

### Strategy and tactics

Since 2000, the group has shifted from military action to a newer platform of tri-people's development, participation, and empowerment, as well as competition in the electoral arena. The RPMM/RPA gives paramount importance to consultations with villagers as stakeholders in the peace process (see Box 1.2).

### Collaboration and friction with other armed groups

The RPMM/RPA has hostile relations with the two groups from which it split, the CPP-NPA-NDFP and its fellow 'rejectionist' Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas (Revolutionary Workers Party of the Philippines) and its Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPM-P/RPA-ABB). The RPMM/RPA has, however, purposely avoided armed encounters with the NPA and claims to have released unharmed two NPA cadres it had captured in 2002.[11] The NPA reportedly assassinated two RPA cadres in 2001 (Rousset, 2003). The RPMM/RPA supports the Moro and Lumad peoples' struggle for self-determination and control over their ancestral domain. It maintains cordial relations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).[12]

## Small arms and light weapons

There is little information on small arms and light weapons and ammunition held by the rebel group, except that its guerillas carry the same weapons as the military and the NPA.[13] RPA members carry high-powered guns such as the Ultimax, rocket-propelled grenades, M60, M203, M16, M14, as well as .45 Colt, .50, and .22 pistols, some with poisoned bullets. According to RPMM sources interviewed on 29 November 2006, some of these guns were taken from the military in past skirmishes, while others were bought from the military or even given by military personnel who are friends, relatives, or supporters of the rebels. Lower-calibre small arms are openly available in gun stores in Mindanao, while higher-calibre weapons can be bought on the black market.[14] Table 13.1 gives estimated prices of small arms in Mindanao, according to interviews with guerrillas on 29 November 2006.

There is no DDR programme being discussed in the peace talks between the RPA-ABB and the government. The members of the group have not laid down their arms.

Table 13.1

**Estimated prices of small arms and light weapons in Mindanao provinces**

| Type of gun | Price of gun | | Price of ammunition | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (in PHP) | (in USD)* | (in PHP) | (in USD)* |
| M203 | 170,000–185,000 | 3,417–3,719 | 600–700 | 13–15 |
| M16 (Colt/Elisco) | 45,000–55,000 | 904–1,105 | 18–19 | 0.36–0.38 |
| M14 | 60,000–65,000 | 1,206–1,307 | 18–19 | 0.36–0.38 |
| .45 Colt | 30,000 | 603 | 21–23 | 0.42–0.46 |
| .50 | 200,000–250,000 | 4,020–5,025 | | |
| M60 (small, baby) | 450,000 | 9,045 | | |

**Exchange rate:** PHP 49.75 = USD 1.00 as of 29 November 2006.

**Source:** Interviews with RPMM/RPA guerillas, 29 November 2006.

## Human security issues

There have been no reports of human rights violations by the rebel group. The RPMM champions the cause of internally displaced persons in Mindanao, and seeks the full implementation of the Indigenous People's Rights Act on development projects in the Lumad areas, including protection of indigenous communities from damage caused by logging and mining (RPMM, 2000c).

## Outlook

### Capacity for negotiations

The RPMM/RPA observed an informal ceasefire with the government and signed a formal cessation of hostilities in October 2005 while negotiating a peace pact with the government (GRP, 2005). Local NGO Balay Mindanaw serves as third party mediator with the help of the local government unit and support from the DED (De Guia, 2005). The rebel group signed an international deed to adhere to a ban on victim-activated anti-personnel landmines in 2003,[15] and in February 2008 signed a declaration, authored by the Philippine Campaign to Ban Landmines, to abide by the 1996 Amended Protocol II, Customary IHL rules on all kinds of landmines and similar explosive devices on civilians or civilian objects and the 2003 Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War (PCBL, 2008).

## Prospects for the future

The RPMM differs from the RPMP in its negotiation with the government in that it will not request permits to carry firearms or funding for its projects (Ermita, 2003). Instead, it has been seeking peace and development projects for Mindanao's 'tri-peoples'. The government panel was 'fast-tracking' the signing of a final peace agreement with the group in 2006, when talks stalled.[16] ■

## Endnotes

1 Interviews with Ike De los Reyes, December 2005 and November 2006. See also RPMM (2002a; 2002b).

2 Interviews with Ike De los Reyes, December 2005 and November 2006. See also RPMM (n.d.)

3 Personal communication to the authors by Ike de los Reyes, 10 August 2006.

4 Interviews with De los Reyes, December 2005 and November 2006, and the introduction to the document 'Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa-Mindanao, Rebolusyonaryong Hukbo ng mga Mamamayan' provided by Ike de los Reyes in August 2006. See also the website of the German Development Service (DED), <http://philippines.ded.de/>.

5 Memorandum to H. E. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo from Sec. Eduardo Ermita, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, 12 June 2003, Item 2 on Proposed Peace Process, p. 2. See also Rules on the Conduct of Formal Talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Program of the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Mindanao (RPM-M), Article II, No. 2, Signed by representatives of both parties in Iligan City, Mindanao, 22 September 2003.

6 'Anak Mindanao' means 'Mindanao's Children', while the acronym 'AMIN' literally means 'ours'.

7 Commission on Elections National Tally Sheet, Party List Canvass Report No. 22, as of 14 June 2005. AMIN kept this seat in the May 2007 elections.

8 President of the Philippines, Memorandum Order No. 108 Providing for the Creation of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) Panel for Negotiations with the RPM-M, 19 July 2003. US dollar conversion added, at 19 July 2003.

9 Interviews with Ike De los Reyes, December 2005 and November 2006.

10 This information is based on varied news accounts of RPMM-RPA activities.

11 Interviews with De los Reyes, 2006.

12 Interviews with Ike De los Reyes, December 2005 and November 2006. See also RPMM (2006a).

13 Author observation based on field work and interviews with guerillas.

14 Observations from a field visit to an RPM-M/RPA area in Lanao del Norte and interview with Ike de los Reyes, 29 November 2006.

15 Deed of Commitment under Geneva Call for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action, Signed by RPM-M Chairperson Harry Tubongbanwa, 11 September 2003.

16 General Secretariat Updates from January to June 2006, GRP-RPM-M, Provided by the Office of the Presidential Adviser for the Peace Process, 26 June 2006.

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## CHAPTER 14

# Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino (Filipino Workers Party) and its Armadong Partisano ng Paggawa (Armed Partisans of Labor) (PMP-APP)

## Overview

The Armed Labor Partisans (Armadong Partisano Ng Paggawa or APP) is the armed wing of the Filipino Workers Party (Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino or PMP-Merger), a merger of three 'rejectionist' splinters of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP-NPA). Launched in 2002, the PMP-APP is politically active in organizing workers and young people in urban areas.

## Basic characteristics

### Typology

The APP is an urban guerilla unit of the PMP-Merger, a Marxist-Leninist workers' party. There are no reports that it has carried out any armed attacks.

### Current status

The APP has not made its presence felt as an armed group. It is thought to have been maintained as a small, informal, and mainly defensive unit of the recently established PMP, though one unofficial PMP source denies that the PMP still has an armed wing.

The PMP's current focus is on building its mass support base, primarily through trade unionism. It claims to have the 'largest revolutionary cadre force and mass base in the urban centres of the country' (De Silva, 2003). Its founder, Filemon 'Ka Popoy' Lagman, used to command elements of the urban guerilla group Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB).

## Origins

The PMP is formed out of units that broke away from the CPP. They advocate urban insurrectionism and tactics similar to the Nicaraguan Sandinistas as opposed to the Maoist rural protracted people's war promoted by the CPP, and they are critical of CPP leadership methods. The breakaway groups that form the PMP are the Manila-Rizal Regional Committee, which split from the CPP in 1993 and, in 1999, became the Filipino Workers' Party (Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino or PMP); the National United Front Commission, which formed the Democratic Proletarian Party (PPD); and the Socialist Labor Party (SPP), which was formed when several CPP forces merged with the old Moscow-aligned Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas-1930 (from which CPP founder and NPA leader Jose Maria Sison split in 1968). In 1999, the SPP allied itself with a faction of the Cordillera Peoples Liberation Army, another CPP-NPA offshoot (Benguet Police Provincial Office, 2000). In 2002, the PMP, PPD, and SPP merged to establish the Filipino Workers' Party (Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino) or PMP-Merger, which has since incorporated a number of revolutionary socialists from the Bangsa Moro nation in Mindanao (De Silva, 2003).

## Aims and ideology

The PMP describes itself as an 'underground revolutionary party of the working class'. It proclaims adherence to Marxism-Leninism—more specifically, Leninism with a socialist orientation. It rejects the CPP-NPA's analysis of Philippine society as 'semi-feudal semi-colonial', regarding it instead as a capitalist country. It opposes the CPP-NPA's Maoist strategy of protracted people's war; it prioritizes mass work, though it retains the option of armed struggle in its programme. The group is also critical of the peace pact signed with the government by the RPMP/RPA-ABB—another CPP-NPA breakaway group—describing it as an act of 'shameless capitulation in exchange for a few pieces of silver' (Ramirez, 2003). It objects to the inclusion of the CPP-NPA on the US and Philippine governments' lists of terrorist organizations (Ramirez, 2002a). An exposition of the PMP ideology—including its thesis countering the main tenets of the CPP's porgramme—is found in the collected writings of its late leader 'Ka Popoy' Lagman (PMP, 2005).

### Leadership

The group's spokesman is Patricio Ramirez, a pseudonym. Its former leader was Popoy Lagman (*nom de guerre* Carlos Forte), who was assassinated by unknown assailants on 6 February 2001. Another name identified with the merged PMP is Sonny Melencio of the SPP.

## Support

### Political base

The following groups reportedly have some affiliation with the PMP: Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (Solidarity of Filipino Workers, or BMP); Kaisahan ng mga Anak ng Manggagawang Pilipino (Union of Children of Filipino Workers, or KAMPI), a student organization; Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (Democratic Association of Youth, or SDK).[1] Also reportedly affiliated with the PMP are the electoral party lists Partido ng Manggagawa (Workers Party) and the broader Sanlakas (One Force), which have won seats in Congress (Leftist Parties of the World, 2004). These two parties have an electoral base in Metro Manila, Central Luzon, Southern Tagalog, and Central and Western Visayas, and are particularly strong in the Central and North-eastern Mindanao regions (Commission on Elections, 2005). Lagman (see 'Leadership', above) was one of the founders of the BMP and Sanlakas.

### Combatants and constituency

Little is known about the combatants and constituency of the APP, except that they are mostly from the urban working class. It is thought to be a small defensive group at present.

## Military activities

There have been no reports of armed incidents between the APP and the mainstream CPP, other armed groups, or the government, lending credence to the claim that the PMP no longer has an armed group. The APP was formerly reported to be an urban guerilla group based mainly in Manila and other urban areas. Its political party, the PMP, operates mainly in Manila-Rizal but with a Luzon-Visayas-Mindanao presence.

### Small arms and light weapons

There is no information available on the armed strength of the PMP-APP, if any.

### Children affiliated with fighting forces

The PMP constitution allows membership of 16-year-olds in the party (PMP Constitution) but does not mention combatants in an armed group.

### Gender

The PMP programme incorporates feminist principles (PMP Program).

## Outlook

The PMP states that armed struggle may be called for 'in the light of the institutionalized violence of the reactionary state and the bastardized democracy of the ruling class' (Ramirez, 2002b). The APP has threatened to strike 'at the appropriate time and with the proper target', and to 'wage a campaign of attrition' should President Arroyo launch a war of annihilation against the working class (Ramirez, 2002b).

The PMP may eventually offer a credible alternative to the CPP-NPA because of its ability to build alliances and unite different factions of the 'Democratic Left'. ■

## Endnotes

1 SDK takes its name—but is different from—the pre-martial law SDK, which initially broke away from and later realigned with the Kabataang Makabayan (KM, Patriotic Youth). These two were the biggest radical youth and student mass organizations at that time. Lagman was a pre-martial law SDK member.

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## CHAPTER 15

# Partido Marxista-Leninista ng Pilipinas (Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines) and its Partisano (Partisans) Group (PMLP-Partisano)

## Overview

The Partisano group of the Partido Marxista-Leninista ng Pilipinas (PMLP) is a reincarnation of the Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB), the urban guerilla hit squad that split from the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) in the 1990s.

## Basic characteristics

### Typology

The PMLP is a small urban guerilla group that claims to work for a 'socialist society of Filipino workers'.

### Current status

The PMLP is apparently very small and with few incidents registered in the media from 2004 to 2006. Most probably defunct since 2007.

### Origins

The PMLP claims to be the 'true' incarnation of the Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB), the former urban guerilla hit squad of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA), formed in 1985. The ABB killed over 200 people in the late 1980s and early 1990s, mostly in Metro Manila (George, 2004). It initially answered to the CPP's Manila-Rizal Regional Party Committee headed by Filemon 'Ka Popoy' Lagman, but in 1991 it broke away from the CPP-NPA, which advocated a return to rural-based warfare (Parreño, 1997a, pp. 1, 5). In 1997, Nilo de la Cruz brought elements of the ABB into the fold of the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas-Revolutionary Proletarian Army (RPM-P/RPA) (Parreño, 1997a; 1997b; Bayoran, 1998; Lacuarta, 2000). One ABB bloc refused to join de la Cruz and reportedly regrouped, forming the PMLP-National Capital Region (NCR, or Metro Manila). An RPMP report claims that many, if not all, in this bloc have since returned to it (RPMP, 2004).

### Aims and ideology

The PMLP identifies itself as a socialist party of the working class.

### Leadership

In 2004, 'Mikhail Leongson' claimed to be the group's spokesperson. In 2005, 'Garbriel Cordova' signed a statement as spokesperson of the Partisano-Armadong Operatiba ng Partido Marxista-Leninista ng Pilipinas (Partisan-Armed Operative of the Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines) for the National Capital Region (Calalo, 2005).

## Support

The PMLP's support comes from the urban poor and working class in Metro Manila.

## Military activities

### Areas of operation, control, and activity

Metro Manila.

### Strategy and tactics

*Assassination of perceived 'enemies of the people'*. The group claimed responsibility for killing a police superintendent in October 2004 on the grounds that he repressed the urban poor, suppressed protests, and killed leaders of mass organizations (Salaverria, 2004; Partisano, 2004).[1] It also claimed responsibility for gunning down a Malabon City market administrator (Calalo, 2005). In both cases, the Partisano operated in groups of four and five, all armed with guns, their faces uncovered. They conducted their attacks in the morning in front of many bystanders and distributed leaflets explaining their motives for the assassinations.

In 2005, the group threatened to assassinate Arroyo and her Vice-President Noli de Castro for reportedly cheating in the 2004 elections, and to kill former election commissioner Virgilio Garcillano for allegedly assisting in the fraud (Inq7.net, 2005).

*Collaboration and friction with other armed groups.* The Partisano group of the PMLP has condemned the CPP led by Sison and Benito and Wilma Tiamzon as 'Maoist trash'. The group claims it is the 'true ABB', as opposed to the ABB aligned with the RPMP-RPA-ABB of Nilo de la Cruz and Carapali Lualhati, which is 'fake' (Partisano, 2004). De la Cruz dismisses the Partisano group, which he says is made up of just five armed individuals from the youth sector.

## Small arms and light weapons

The elements responsible for killing the police superintendent (see 'Strategy and tactics', above) were armed with an M16 rifle and .45 and 9 mm pistols.

## Human security issues

The group fired at a passenger bus wounding four civilians and commandeered a civilian passenger vehicle during the operation against the police superintendent.

## Outlook

The group did not make its presence felt in 2006 or 2007, beyond painting anti-Arroyo and anti-US slogans on fences in Metro Manila. ■

## Endnotes

1 There was some initial confusion as to which group claimed the killing, with an earlier media report attributing it to the MLPP-RHB. See ABS-CBN.com (2004).

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# CHAPTER 16

# Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines and its Rebolusyonaryong Hukbong Bayan (Revolutionary People's Army) (MLPP-RHB)[1]

## Overview

The Rebolusyonaryong Hukbong Bayan (RHB, Revolutionary People's Army) is the armed group of the Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines (MLPP), a splinter group of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA). It is based in Central Luzon, in the northern Philippines. It has also incorporated former elements of the CPP's Metro Manila Provisional Regional Party Committee, the National Trade Union Bureau, and the National Peasant Secretariat.

## Basic characteristics

### Typology

Communist/socialist. The group is pursuing a rural-based people's war to overthrow the Manila government and establish a Communist republic along Maoist lines.

### Current status

There are conflicting reports about the current status of this armed group. Media and other public sources indicate that it remains active, but has been and continues to be decimated in encounters with both the military and the New People's Army (NPA-CPP) and by the surrender of its leaders in Central Luzon. Two senior MLPP-RHB leaders—Domingo Tarectecan (known as comrade Delfin) and Christopher de Guzman (comrade Acay)—were arrested in La Union province, Luzon, in February 2007 (PNP, 2007; Lazaro, 2007).

According to the military and to a former RHB leader, the depleted group now relies on robbery to sustain itself (Bayoran, 2006; Lazaro, Roxas, and Espinosa, 2005). The group has been vilified by the mainstream CPP-NPA, which accuses it of counter-revolutionary and criminal acts and has launched attacks on RHB troops in the Southern Tagalog and Eastern Visayas regions (Bautista, 2004).

The leaders of three other 'rejectionist' Marxist-Leninist groups, the RPM-P, the RPMM, and the PMP, provide more favourable accounts of the MLPP-RHB, crediting the group with more sincerity in its aims and stating that it is expanding to other regions in Luzon (Bautista, 2004). Indeed, Tarectecan had been reportedly overseeing RHB expansion into La Union and Benguet provinces when he was killed (Jane's Strategic Advisory Service, 2007).

## Origins

The Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines (MLPP) comprises the CPP regional party committee in Central Luzon, former elements of the CPP's Metro Manila Provisional Regional Party Committee, the National Trade Union Bureau, and the National Peasant Secretariat. These cadres first 'reaffirmed' CPP-NPA leader Jose Maria Sison's return to a peasant-based protracted people's war strategy in the 1992 debate but later separated over ideological and organizational differences. In 1997, Philippine-based CPP leader Benito Tiamzon expelled the Central Luzon cadres who argued that they should work in the urban areas of Luzon and should engage with legal NGOs. Tiamzon accused them of 'civilianization of the [Central Luzon NPA] army, exceptionalism, and factionalism'.[2] When they did not receive the support they expected from Sison, the expelled cadres established the MLPP in September 1998 (Quimpo, 2001). The group formally severed its ties with the CPP-NPA in 1999. In 2000, the NPA launched attacks on the MLPP, liquidated one of its military units, and assassinated a well-known NPA Commander who had become the RHB's Chief Military Staff. The MLPP now maintains a policy of active defence against the NPA (MLPP, 2003; Bautista, 2004).

## Aims and ideology

The party is Marxist-Leninist-Maoist. It respects Maoism and its members study the works of Leon Trotsky, but it is critical of Stalinism. The aims and ideology of the MLPP-RHB are broadly the same as the CPP-NPA's: both groups consider Philippine society to be semi-colonial and semi-feudal, and wage a protracted people's war in the countryside with the aim of overthrowing the Manila government and establishing a Communist republic along Maoist lines. The MLPP-RHB is said by a number of rejectionists and leftist activists and former activists interviewed for this publication to be 'more RA (reaffirmist) than the RAs'.

### Leadership

Francisco Pascual, Caridad Magpantay Pascual, and Luisita de la Cruz hold senior positions in the MLPP-RHB hierarchy (Lazaro, Roxas, and Espinosa, 2005; MIPT; Office of the Press Secretary, 2002). A news report from 2002 states that Frank Pascual split from the MLPP to form the Marxist Leninist Caucus. His ex-wife, Caridad Magpantay Pascual, now leads the MLPP-RHB (Gloria, 2002, p. 9). Francisco Pascual has reportedly since formed a legal organization working for land reform. Leonard Guevarra and Red Olalia sign as the MLPP Information officer and Information Officer of the RHB, respectively.

The MLPP has a Central Committee that guides the RHB's Interim National Command and its activities in the regions. The political party issued a constitution, by-laws, and a statement of principles in 2000. The MLPP-RHB criticizes the CPP-NPA's centrism in organizational matters and policies.

## Support

### Political base

The underground Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines (MLPP) commands the RHB. The legal Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya (KPD, or Movement for Nationalism and Democracy), led by Millet Morante, has been identified with the group (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2001; Leftist Parties of the World, 2004).

### Combatants and constituency

The combatants are expelled members of the CPP-NPA and their recruits mainly drawn from the rural poor of western Luzon.

### Sources of financing and support

The group has been accused of extortion and other criminal activities in Pampanga and other parts of Central Luzon (Lazaro, Roxas, and Espinosa, 2005). The military states that the rebels collect as much as PHP 50,000–70,000 per month (USD 1,100–1,530) from residents in Pampanga, Bataan, Zambales, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, and Aurora provinces (Isip, Sy Egco, and Esconde, 2005). The RHB denies the claims, however, stating that support comes from voluntary contributions and the five peso (USD 0.06) monthly dues of its members. The group says it practises self-reliance, depends on the masses, and strictly prohibits 'dirty jobs', such as bank robberies and kidnapping. It claims it has no policy of forced taxation but says 'contributions from the class enemy are negotiable.'[3]

## Military activities

### Size and strength

In 1998, the MLPP claimed it had over 500 individual members who were expelled from the CPP. Media reports in 2005 and 2006 put the number of RHB armed guerillas at fewer than 50, down from a 2003 estimate of 271 armed cadres (Isip, Sy Egco, and Esconde, 2005; Bayoran, 2006; MIPT). Squad-sized units were spotted in Eastern Visayas in 2002 (Bautista, 2004). The group claims to operate nationwide and to be expanding, though its presence outside of Luzon is likely to be confined to individual cadres or small units.

### Command and control

The leader of the armed RHB is Caridad Magpantay Pascual (Gloria, 2002, p. 9).

### Military organization

Like other Marxist-Leninist armed groups in the Philippines, the MLPP gives primacy to political work and asserts the party's political control over the armed RHB. The RHB operates in squad-size units, with each squad consisting of seven to nine guerillas.[4]

### Areas of activity

The RHB operates in Central Luzon; in particular, Pampanga, Bataan, Zambales, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, and Aurora provinces. It has reportedly tried to operate in Southern Tagalog, Eastern Visayas, southern Negros, and Bicol (Orejas and Villa, 2005; Bautista, 2004).

### Strategy and tactics

The group has been involved in guerilla warfare in the countryside and is open to urban warfare, though has yet to be involved in urban conflict. The RHB is not known to have conducted any offensive operations against the security operations. Given the disparity in size between its own forces and those of the NPA-CPP, it does not seek to attack the NPA-CPP either, though its members have been drawn into skirmishes with the group.

## Small arms and light weapons

The military in the Visayas has reportedly recovered 15 high-powered firearms in several encounters with RHB fighters since 2001 (Bayoran, 2006). In Nueva Ecija, among the weapons recovered from the RHB in 2005 were six M16 rifles, one M653 rifle, one M14 rifle, one Thompson .45 sub-machine gun, one Uzi, one .30 M2 carbine, one Garand rifle, one. 45 pistol, three rifle grenades, and ammunition (Lazaro, Roxas, and Espinosa, 2005). A 9 mm pistol loaded with five bullets, one Super .38 revolver, four .38 revolvers, and three fragmentation hand grenades were taken from the group in Bataan, Central Luzon, some of which had been reportedly taken from the police (Isip, Sy Egco, and Esconde, 2005). In Ilocos, in 2004 the group also reportedly surrendered one .30 M1 carbine, one .30 Springfield, one home-made 5.56 mm bolt-action, and one unserviceable M15 rifle (MIPT). The CPP-NPA said it seized one M2 carbine, one M79 grenade launcher, two grenades, and one rifle grenade from the RHB in Eastern Visayas, though the RHB denies this last report (Bautista, 2004). The RHB is estimated to hold no more than 250 firearms (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007).

## Human security issues

### Children affiliated with fighting forces

The group reportedly targets minors and teenagers to augment its dwindling forces (Bayoran, 2006; MIPT). The RHB denies this, however, stating it recruits only those aged 18 years and older.

### Human rights

The group mistakenly killed a radio correspondent in 2000 and apologized for it (Committee to Project Journalists, 2000). Members of the RHB also reportedly killed a police senior superintendent while they were acting as hired guns for a shipping magnate (Andrade, 2005). The CPP-NPA has directed a litany of accusations against the RHB, including serving as the private army of local politicians and gambling lords, extorting money from the poor, abducting a Central Luzon CPP cadre, and even murder, rape, kidnap, and harassment of leaders and members of militant organizations (Bautista, 2004).

## Outlook

The MLPP states that it would welcome a truce with the CPP-NPA (MLPP, 2003). It has not attempted to enter into negotiations with the Philippine government, nor has the government proposed any formal peace process with the group. On 29 March 2008 the MLPP became the second armed group in the Philippines to sign up to the Rebel Group Declaration of Adherence to International Humanitarian Law on Landmines. The Declaration, drafted by the Philippine Campaign to Ban Landmines, commits groups to a ban on anti-personnel mines. ■

## Endnotes

1 Much of the information for this chapter comes from an interview with 'Ka' (Comrade) George, conducted in March 2007. Ka George states that he is an ordinary member of the group but was authorized by the leadership to speak for the MLPP-RHB.

2 Interview with Ka George, March 2007.

3 Interview with Ka George, March 2007.

4 Interview with Ka George, March 2007.

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## CHAPTER 17

# Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA)

## Overview

The Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA) is an armed group of indigenous people in the Cordillera mountain range of northern Luzon, many members of which have been integrated into the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Originally made up of units that split from the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA), it has since suffered from factionalism and infighting. It continues to push for regional autonomy, more than 20 years after signing a peace pact with the Philippine government.

## Basic characteristics

### Typology

The CPLA is an armed group of indigenous people based in the Cordillera mountains that seeks regional autonomy and is currently being integrated into the government armed forces. The group now considers armed struggle to be secondary to legal parliamentary struggle (Buendia, 1991).

### Current status

There are conflicting reports about the status of the CPLA. The group was first reportedly unified under the leadership of Mailed Molina and Corazon Cortel (Conrado Balweg's widow, see below) with Arsenio Humiding acting as chair when Molina ran for a government position (Cabreza, 2007). Molina was still claiming the chairmanship in 2008.[1] According to the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), the CPLA has divided into at least three factions. Once applauded for helping with peacekeeping in the region, some CPLA elements and factions have been accused of murder, illegal logging, and marijuana trafficking (CRC, 1989). Hundreds of CPLA members were integrated into the Philippine Army (AFP) and Citizens Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU) militia in 2001 (see Chapter 6).

## Origin

In the early 1970s, indigenous people joined the New People's Army (NPA) and the Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA) in resisting the Marcos dictatorship and the operations of multinational companies in the Cordillera, in particular the Cellophil Resources Corporation in Abra, the Chico River Dam project spanning the Mountain Province and Kalinga, and the Batong Buhay Gold Mining Project in Kalinga. The Cordillera mountain ranges soon became known as active operations bases for the NPA (CRC, 2000, p. 1). The Cordillera units seceded from the NPA because of perceived discrimination against highland NPA members; by the drive by ex-Catholic priest turned NPA commander Conrado Balweg for the self-determination of mountain tribes to be recognized immediately and not only after victory; and by the decision by the NPA to put Balweg under house arrest on suspicion of sexual and financial opportunism (Coronel-Ferrer, 1997, pp. 213–14; CRC, 2000, p. 1). They established the CPLA in April 1986—soon after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship—and focused on the struggle for regional autonomy and self-determination. The founding members were mostly Cordillerans belonging to different ethnolinguistic national minorities.

In September 1986, the CPLA entered into a *sipat* (cessation of hostilities) with President Corazon Aquino. It became a partner of the government for development projects in the Cordilleras, though it continued to agitate against the Cellophil Resources Corporation and the Chico River Dam project. The group continued to advocate regional autonomy, which was only partially granted by the governments of Aquino and her successors, Fidel Ramos, Joseph Estrada, and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (see Chapter 6).

Internally, the CPLA faced a leadership problem and accused Balweg of misuse of the organization's funds, corruption, and dereliction of duties as leader (CPLA, 1993). On 30 June 1993 the CPLA and its political arm, the Cordillera Bodong Administration (CBA), announced a reshuffle, which Balweg rejected, leading to the creation of another CPLA faction headed by Mailed Molina and James Sawatang. The government sided with Balweg. The NPA killed Balweg in Abra in 1999 (Rousset, 2003), whereupon his widow Corazon Cortel took over the CPLA leadership. Cortel eventually joined Molina;[2] she died of natural causes in March 2008. The government, through the OPAPP, continues to deal with this faction (OPAPP, 2008).

The group has suffered politically and economically in recent years, and has expressed anger at the failure of successive governments to honour their commitments to grant the region greater autonomy and to integrate CPLA members into the AFP and the official auxiliary groups of the security forces. In 2001, President Arroyo signed an order integrating 264 Mailed-faction members into the AFP and 528 members into six CAFGU companies deployed in six Cordillera provinces and elsewhere (OPAPP, 2008; Solmerin, 2004). In 2004, the CBA and the CPLA again declared autonomy and threatened war. In April 2008, a new agreement was signed promising to fulfil the commitments of the 1986 Mount Data Peace Accord.

## Aims and ideology

The core CPLA demand was the setting up of a Cordillera autonomous region founded on the indigenous peace pact institution of the bodong, which results in alliances and commonwealths of tribes. The CPLA and the CBA do not wish to secede from the national government, but aim to free their indigenous people from the Filipino majority that makes 'use of the State to perpetuate national oppression against the minority people in the Cordillera' (Garming, 1989, p. 9). They seek autonomy, equal rights, justice against oppression and exploitation, and participation in peacekeeping in their territories. Formerly with the CPP-NPA, the CPLA has since eschewed Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, aiming instead for Cordillera regional autonomy through parliamentary struggle based on the bodong.

## Leadership

Arsenio Humiding is acting leader of the unified CPLA. Former chair Mailed Molina—the former mayor of Bucloc town who was briefly arrested in June 2007 on charges of drug trafficking and possession of illegal weapons—continues to describe himself as CPLA chair (Andrade, 2007; Cabreza, 2007). As of 2003–04, at least three other CPLA factions exist: the Yao group, the Bun-as group, and the Aydinan group of the CPLA-Kalinga (OPAPP, 2008). When interviewed in Cagayan de Oro City on 30 November 2006, Corazon Cortel and Arsenio Humiding of the unified CPLA dismissed them as 'leftovers' rather than factions. The Balweg and the Molina factions united under their newly elected chairman Mailed Molina at a Workshop on CPLA Concerns held on 25 April 2008 in Tabuk City, Kalinga province. The April 2008 Joint Declaration of Commitment promising to fulfil the commitments of the 1986 Mount Data Peace Accord with the GRP was signed on the CPLA's behalf by Molina and CBA President Marcelina Bahatan.

### Political base, combatants, and constituency

The various CPLA factions claim the same mass base, field commanders, and foot soldiers among the indigenous people in the central Cordillera region. This region comprises the provinces of Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, and Mountain Province (CPA, n.d., p. 7). The Cordillera Bodong Administration led by Marcelina Bahatan is the CPLA's political centre (Cabreza, 2007).

### Sources of financing and support

The government released PHP 10 million (USD 380,400) in livelihood loan assistance to former rebels in 1986–96 and PHP 7.5 million (USD 285,300) for development projects in the Cordillera (Coronel-Ferrer, 1997).[3] Twenty years after the peace pact, the government admitted it had not delivered on its promises of land reform, integration, or even 'clean water, good roads, and livelihood projects' for the Kalinga CPLA (Cabreza, 2006a, p. A20). The Philippine Senate cut the 2006 budget allocation for development projects in the Cordilleras (Cabreza, 2006b).

## Military activities

### Size and strength

In 2001, around 1,200 CPLA members were integrated into the AFP and promised livelihood projects by the government. In 2006, President Arroyo directed the Department of National Defense to integrate 3,800 CPLA members into the official security forces and the armed civilian auxiliary forces (see Chapter 6). The government estimated active CPLA members to number 4,000 in 2007 (PIA, 2007).

### Collaboration and friction with other armed groups

The CPLA engages in sporadic fighting with NPA units in the Cordilleras. In 2004, the CPLA urged all non-Cordillera armed groups—including the AFP, the NPA, and private armies—to leave their territory (Solmerin, 2004).

In 1999, the Mailed CPLA faction forged an alliance with the *Sosyalitang Partido ng Paggawa* (SPP), which is reportedly made up of breakaway organizations and personalities from the local Communist movements with links to the MNLF, the MILF, and the Abu Sayyaf Group (Benguet Police Provincial Office, 2000). The SPP eventually merged with the Filipino Workers Party (Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino, PMP) in 2002 (see Chapter 14).

## Small arms and light weapons

Guns are highly valued among the people in the Cordilleras and nearby provinces. CPLA members and their sympathizers have not laid down arms, and argue that the peace pact between the government and the CPLA does not require them to do so.

Spears, bolos, and other primitive weapons have traditionally been used by Cordillera indigenous people in warfare but have been supplanted in many instances by guns, which have reportedly altered the nature of ritual peace processes among politically autonomous villages engaged in conflict over water rights, boundary disputes, or killings and counter-killings. Previously a declaration of war accompanied by rituals and omens used to precede hostilities in traditional warfare. In addition, peace sanctuary areas were maintained, and combat was face-to-face. Such rituals are reportedly no longer followed because 'bullets made reprisals too impersonal' (Prill-Brett, 2005).

## Human security issues

### Children associated with fighting forces

A 2005 independent report suggests child soldiers were recruited (PHRIC, 2005).

### Human rights

The CPLA has been accused of human rights abuses, including the killing of CPP sympathizer and tribal leader Daniel Ngayaan in 1987 and harassment of an NGO conducting relief operations for earthquake victims that same year. Molina has been accused of continuing to recruit people—some with criminal records—to his private army and of using his private army to his personal political advantage; he rejects the accusations. In 1999, the Baguio City Council proclaimed Molina *persona non grata* after he paraded in the city with 300 armed men on Cordillera day (Benguet Police Provincial Office, 2000; CPA, c. 1988).

## Outlook

More than 20 years after signing a peace pact with the government in 1986, the CPLA has not realized its goal of helping to develop the tribal communities of the Cordillera, much less achieved the autonomy it aspires to (Malanes, 2007). The Cordillera peace pact—the first peace agreement between the Philippine government and a rebel group—may be an example of a failed experience in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) if it is not saved by the present government. The GRP and the CBA-CPLA signed a Joint Declaration of Commitment on 25 April 2008 'toward the completion of the 1986 Mount Data Peace Accord'. Consensus points included an expansion of livelihood assistance to CPLA members who have not benefited in the past and the involvement of the Department of Justice to determine the correct interpretation of the provision for the establishment of the Cordillera Regional Security Force (see Chapter 6). ■

## Endnotes

1 A news report from 8 November 2009 suggests that Molina was voted out of the leadership (Madarang, 2009).

2 Interview with Corazon Cortel, 30 November 2006.

3 Currency conversions at the rate obtaining on 31 December 1996.

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# MORO/MUSLIM/MINDANAO FRONT

## CHAPTER 18

# Moro National Liberation Front and its Bangsamoro Armed Forces (MNLF-BAF)

## Overview

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) is the most significant rebel group to have entered into a final peace agreement with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP). An Islamo-separatist movement, it led the armed resistance in Muslim Mindanao against the martial law regime of President Ferdinand E. Marcos in the early 1970s and was recognized as 'the sole legitimate representative of Muslims in Southern Philippines ("Bangsamoro people")' by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).[1] Several rounds of on-and-off peace negotiations over three decades were concluded in 1996 under the auspices of the OIC. But the implementation of the 1996 final peace agreement has been contentious. While a significant number of MNLF combatants has been integrated into the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP), there has been no disarmament or demobilization of the group. Since 2001, there have been occasional armed hostilities between the MNLF and the AFP in the MNLF heartland of Jolo island in the Sulu archipelagic province. Sulu hostilities in 2005 involved some apparent tactical cooperation between the MNLF and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) against the AFP, but in 2006 the MNLF shifted policy by actively cooperating with the AFP against the ASG in Sulu. Fierce fighting between the MNLF and the AFP again erupted in April 2007, and several MNLF camps in Sulu were taken. The MNLF therefore has one foot inside government but has not yet fully shed its rebel persona.

## Basic characteristics

### Typology

The MNLF is a Moro rebel group with ambitions that are subnational geographically, but national in relation to a Moro nation.

## Current status

The MNLF is active and mainly concerned with the implementation of its final peace agreement with the GRP. There has been some division within the group in recent years around the issue of its paramount leader, Nur Misuari, but this is slowly being resolved in favour of the restoration of his pre-eminence in the MNLF.

## Origins

The MNLF originated in 1969 during military training in Malaysia of the 'Top 90' first batch of Moro youth and student activists. The Moro student activists and politicians were moved to attend the training by the 18 March 1968 Jabidah Massacre of Moro trainee soldiers who had refused to participate in a plan to invade Sabah, Malaysia. But the Moro politicians who arranged the training—led by Rashid Lucman—were primarily concerned with raising private armies to protect their own interests. When the young Moro trainees realized this, they decided to form their own group focused on Moro national liberation. Misuari was selected leader in recognition of his seniority, intellectual prowess, and links with influential politicians of all three major Moro tribes. The name 'Moro National Liberation Front' did not emerge until the second 'Batch 300' of young Moro trainees graduated in 1970.[2]

The 'National Liberation Front' of the group's name was inspired by the national liberation movements of the 1960s, notably the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Misuari had been exposed to Marxist-Leninist-Maoist radicalism and Filipino nationalist student activism while studying and teaching at the University of the Philippines. He had also been involved with the radical Kabataang Makabayan (KM, Patriotic Youth)[3] and its founder, Communist leader Jose Maria Sison, which reinforced his secular-nationalist orientation, though he eventually redirected his activism to Moro nationalism. MNLF's first Vice-Chairman Abul Khayr Alonto is credited with adding 'Moro' to the group's name, reclaiming a denomination that had previously been used pejoratively, and providing a common identity for the 13 Islamized but disparate ethno-linguistic tribes in their historical homeland of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan.

## Aims

The MNLF's original aim as articulated in its 1974 Manifesto was the liberation of the Moro nation 'from the terror, oppression and tyranny of Filipino colonialism . . . to secure a free and independent state for the Bangsa Moro people . . . and to see the democratization of the wealth in their homeland' (Misuari, 1974). The latter egalitarian plank has since been de-emphasized or forgotten. Since the 1996 Peace Agreement the MNLF has adopted the expressed aim of liberation through peace and development in the form of autonomy for the Muslims in the Southern Philippines. The group's leaders—Misuari in particular—often invoke their original aim of 'decolonization' and independence, however, which resonates strongly among the Moros. Some insiders say the MNLF has for some time now outlived its reason for being a 'liberation front', becoming instead an instrument for political and personal aggrandizement of its top leaders.[4]

## Ideology

Misuari has said that 'nationalism takes as much precedence as the inspired verses of the Holy Qur'an as the ideological root of the Bangsa Moro people's revolution' (Misuari, 1992, pp. 38–39). In the Tausug language, the three roots of the MNLF are described as *Bangsa* (nation), *Hulah* (homeland), and *Agama* (religion, which is Islam), in that order, reflecting a struggle that 'is principally a nationalist and territorial one, although religion has certainly served as a rallying call and focal point of resistance to the central government' (Tan, 2003, p. 112).

## Leadership

The MNLF's leadership has always centred on Misuari, the *Maas* (Tausug for 'wise old man') of the Moro struggle, even during the six years he was in detention until he was released on bail in April 2008. The first Central Committee of the MNLF was formed at its Libya base in 1974 and comprised 13 members, seven of whom—including Misuari—were secular. One of the religious members was MNLF head of foreign affairs Hashim Salamat, who led the MILF split in 1977.

Misuari's leadership has been criticized for being exclusive and at times even dictatorial, and was a key reason for the most significant splits in the MNLF, notably the MILF split and the so-called 'Executive Council of 15 (EC-15)' split in 2001. The latter split resulted in four factions: the Misuari group, the anti-Misuari EC-15, the pro-Misuari group of Alvarez Isnaji, and the anti-Misuari Islamic Command Council, with some overlaps and occasional merging. One insider observes that historically the MNLF 'is factionalized every time it talks peace with the GRP'.[5]

An MNLF unity process undertaken at the initiative of Libya, the group's old sponsor, highlighted the common cause of the four factions against the government's unilateral and flawed implementation of the peace agreement (see Chapter 3).[6] The main MNLF forces—including those in its Sulu/Tausug heartland—returned to Misuari, though for a long time the GRP officially recognized the EC-15 as the MNLF leadership it sponsored. Long-standing MNLF Vice-Chairman Hatimil Hassan, an ethnic Yakan from Basilan province, was the nominal leader of the EC-15, though its most significant member in terms of forces commanded was MNLF Secretary General Muslimin Sema, a Maguindanaon who has been mayor of Cotabato City for several terms.

Sema was elected Chairman of a reconvened Central Committee (CC) 'composed of veteran, longtime chartered senior members' of the MNLF at a meeting on 1–3 April 2008 in Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur. The meeting involved 32 out of 49 members of the CC and determined to continue to support the 1996 Peace Agreement 'as the vehicle for peace and development', but, more significantly, to seek to restore the MNLF as 'the vanguard of the Bangsamoro

Un ardent défenseur
de la cause palestinienne

MNLF Chairman Professor Nur Misuari at his house arrest quarters in March 2008, a month before his release on bail. © Soliman M. Santos, Jr.

people'. This was to be done through 'the New MNLF Leadership' which has taken the place of the EC-15 as the main rival to Misuari. It includes former pro-Misuari faction leader Alvarez Isnaji, the incumbent mayor of Indanan, Sulu, whom the meeting endorsed as 'the MNLF common candidate' for regional governor in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) election of August 2008 (MNLF CC, 2008).[7] Isnaji was arrested and detained in June 2008, however, for his alleged involvement in a kidnap-for-ransom incident, and subsequently lost the election.

## Political base

The MNLF's political base is the Moro nation or the Bangsamoro people or the Muslims in southern Philippines. Among the 13 Islamized ethnic tribes, its political base is strongest among the Tausug, Sama, and Yakan in the Western (Island) Mindanao provinces of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan, and parts of the Zamboanga peninsula. It also has a significant following among the Maguindanao and Maranao tribes of Central (Mainland) Mindanao. In general terms the MNLF's Moro base is wider than the MILF's, with forces as far from the Moro heartland as the Davao provinces and far-off Palawan island province.

As for political party association, the most that the MNLF has achieved is a formal alliance with the ruling Lakas (Strength) party of President Fidel V. Ramos (1992–98) as part of the political settlement surrounding the 1996 Peace Agreement. This political alliance enabled Misuari to run unopposed for regional governor of the ARMM. The success of other MNLF leaders who have run for regional and local government posts has tended to depend on government support—the administrations of presidents Joseph Estrada (1998–2001) and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001–present) have not been supportive of the MNLF mainstream.

## Combatants and constituency

The MNLF's combatants span at least two generations and include people who look both younger than 18 years (i.e. child soldiers) and older than 60 (against a national retirement age for soldiers of 56). During the height of the 'Moro war of liberation' in the early 1970s, the various Moro armed resistance groups tended to come from Moro youth led by traditional and secular elites, and most of the villagers in war-affected communities were involved in the struggle (Che Man, 1990, pp. 76, 80). This reflected the broad cross-class constituency of the MNLF in Moro/Muslim areas of Western (Island) and Central (Mainland) Mindanao.

### Sources of financing and other support

The MNLF has always relied heavily on external funding, which explains Misuari's fear of isolation from the OIC. Up until the 1996 Peace Agreement, the MNLF's financial and logistical support came mainly from external sources, chiefly Libya. Libya and the OIC contributed some USD 35 million to the MNLF in 1972–75, some in the form of weapons, military equipment, and other supplies, which were smuggled through the eastern Malaysian state of Sabah (Che Man, 1990, pp. 78–79, 83, 140). It is said that Malaysia became the administrator of the USD 1 million per year provided by the OIC up until the 1996 Peace Agreement.[8] Libya also hosted training, replacing Malaysia as the MNLF's principal training venue from the mid-1970s. MNLF training was supplemented in the 1980s by Syria, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) camps in the Middle East, and Pakistan (ICG, 2004, p. 4). Other major external sources of financial assistance included the Islamic Solidarity Fund, some Muslim government agencies, and foundations and companies, notably Saudi Arabia's Muslim World League and Darul Ifta (religious advisory council). Domestic financial support was mainly through *zakat* (alms), which were sometimes provided as rice and other foodstuffs (Che Man, 1990, pp. 83–84, 141). After 1996, the group benefited from government financial support arising from its control of the ARMM.

## Military activities

### Size and strength

In 1994, the AFP estimated the number of MNLF at 14,000; two years later the AFP estimate was 17,700 (Makinano and Lubang, 2001, p. 29). The implementation of the 1996 Peace Agreement resulted in the integration of 6,905 (of a projected 7,500) MNLF elements into the AFP and PNP as of 2006 (see Chapter 7). A significant number of these integrees were not MNLF fighters themselves, however, but rather their successors or beneficiaries (Ferrer, 2000). Some MNLF fighters have returned to civilian life, formed their own groups, or joined existing groups, including the rival MILF, kidnap-for-ransom gangs, and terrorist groups (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, p. 29).

The MNLF's own figures may not be very reliable. The MNLF's Muhtalla National Force Command under Chief Commander D/Gen. Hadji Andy Gappal, supposedly constituting the all-purpose forward command battalions, allegedly has 30,000 card-bearing members in Mindanao and Palawan, and Misuari claims that it is only one of more than 40 units of the Bangsa Moro Army (BMA). The group claimed that 7,000 and 3,000 MNLF fighters, respectively, were convened in 1999 to listen to Misuari at rallies in Camp Maharlika in Lantawan, Basilan, and at the MNLF's Jabal Nur Camp in Lanao del Sur (Ferrer, 2000).

A reliable recent estimate of MNLF size and strength in its main base, Sulu province, puts the number at around 5,800, about one-third of its former

MNLF fighters raise their banner and arms as they cry 'Allahu Akbar' ('God is great'). The image was taken in January 2008 at MNLF Camp Amilhamja in Langpas, Indanan, Sulu. © Arthur C. Fuentes/SSN strength.[9] This is still a formidable force in the group's heartland; the biggest AFP deployment to Sulu in recent years was in 2006, when it deployed nine battalions or about 4,500 troops against the much smaller forces of the ASG and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) (Alipala, 2006). The AFP has grossly underestimated the size of the MNLF mainstream, which it calls the 'Misuari Breakaway Group' (MBG), at '700 concentrated mainly in Sulu and parts of Zamboanga del Norte' in 2006 (Esperon, 2006, p. 6).

## Command and control

A 2000 study showed the MNLF to be organized primarily as a military organization rather than a political one: two-thirds of the Central Committee members are military officials (i.e. with positions in the BMA) (Ferrer, 2000). The military chiefs of the following commands sit on the Central Committee: national intelligence service, military intelligence service, national field command, northern Mindanao command, national marines, air defence command, 'spider' division, and comptroller general's office (Ferrer, 2000).

The MNLF has its own army called the Bangsa Moro Army (BMA) or Bangsamoro Armed Forces, which came under the control of the Central Committee. The BMA is organized as a conventional rather than a guerrilla army. It has a General Staff, responsible for a National Mobile Force consisting of the 1st to 4th Armies occupying at least 13 permanent camps, as well as ten Provincial Armies, each with Zone Forces, Municipality Forces, and Barrio (Village) Defense Forces (Che Man, 1990, pp. 191–93). There are also parallel military and political departments represented by 57 national commanders and 28 state chairmen, respectively.[10]

Historically, the BMA was loosely knit and was unable to construct a clearly established chain of command. A wide communication gap seemed to exist between the Central Committee and the field commanders. The Central Committee appeared to focus on gathering external support and setting broad policy outlines, leaving field commanders to make their own operational decisions (Che Man, 1990, p. 83).

This seems still to be the case in Sulu, where MNLF force mobilization appears to be confined to five municipalities: Indanan, Maimbung, Patikul, Talipao, and Panamao.[11] The MNLF Lupag Sug (Sulu) State Revolutionary Committee

(SRC) under State Chairman Major General Khaid O. Ajibun is in charge only of military operations in the western sector of Sulu, while an MNLF Task Force Jabal Uhud under Commanding General Ustadz Khabir Malik is in charge of the eastern sector. Confusion arises from time to time over their areas of command. The recent factionalism in the MNLF has also led to confusion over chains of command, with faction leaders claiming certain commanders or commands.

## Areas of operation

The MNLF areas of operation are best gleaned from the provinces and cities covered by its 16 State Revolutionary Committees, grouped into two main sectors, Island Mindanao and Mainland Mindanao.

Table 18.1

**Locations of MNLF State Revolutionary Committees**

| SRC | States covered; number of municipalities in parentheses |
|---|---|
| Island Mindanao | |
| Lupah Sug | Sulu (18) |
| Tawi-Tawi | Tawi-Tawi (10) |
| Basilan | Basilan (6), Isabela City |
| Zamboanga City | Zamboanga City |
| Mainland Mindanao | |
| Western Kutawatu | Maguindanao (9), Cotabato City, Sultan Kudarat (3) |
| New Utara Kutawatu | Maguindanao (6), Lanao del Sur (1) |
| Central Kutawatu | Maguindanao (5), Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat (9) |
| Sebangan Kutawatu | Maguindanao (2), North Cotabato (17), Kidapawan City |
| Selatan Kutawato | Saranggani (7), General Santos City, Koronadal City, South Cotabato (10) |
| Ranao Sur | Lanao del Sur (19) |
| Central Ranao | Lanao del Sur (18), Marawi City |
| Ranao Norte | Lanao del Norte (20), Iligan City |
| Zamboanga Norte | Zamboanga del Norte (25), Dipolog City, Dapitan City |
| Zamboanga Sur | Zamboanga del Sur, Pagadian City |
| Zamboanga Zibugay | Zamboanga Sibugay (16) |
| Satar Davao | Davao del Sur (14), Digos City, Davao City |

**Source:** General Secretariat, MNLF (2006, p. 11). This reference is from the MNLF EC-15 faction.

## Strategy and tactics

The MNLF has employed a strategy combining armed struggle, Islamic diplomacy, and peace negotiations. Since the 1996 Peace Agreement its accent has been on the last two modes of struggle, along with engagement in electoral and parliamentary processes. Armed hostilities and threats are largely used for tactical—not strategic—purposes, to support MNLF political demands related to the peace process. MNLF forays into electoral politics, regional and local autonomous governance, and lobbying with both the legislative and the executive departments of national government have reaped mixed rewards for the MNLF, especially since the end of the friendly Ramos administration in 1998. The OIC's annual Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) remains the most important political and diplomatic arena for the MNLF, above even the Philippine Congress.

Ten days of fighting between the MNLF and GRP in February 2005 showed that the group is capable of conducting conventional warfare against the AFP (Mindanao Peaceweavers, 2005, pp. 7–9). The MNLF launched frontal attacks against AFP fixed positions using .50 and .30 machine guns, 81 mm and 60 mm mortars, bazookas, and a B57. The AFP countered with artillery, aerial bombardment, and ground troop assaults against MNLF fixed positions in both the eastern and the western fronts in Sulu. Despite the dozens of casualties on both sides, independent observers found no evidence of any civilian casualties during the ten-day war. This was largely attributable to the pre-evacuation of as many as 70,000 civilians from the battle zones, notably the MNLF-led evacuation of its own civilian mass base in certain critical areas.

## Collaboration with other armed groups

The MNLF has cordial fraternal relations with its old main splinter and rival group, the MILF. Relations were better between the MILF and the government-recognized MNLF EC-15 faction (since replaced by the new Sema-led 'old guard' Central Committee of the MNLF) than with the mainstream MNLF Misuari group; the EC-15 even included the MILF in its delegations to the ICFM. But Misuari in particular is still bitter about the breakaway MILF, as he is about the EC-15. Residual sectarianism and tribalism in the MNLF and

MILF, as well as feelings of triumphalism and superiority over each other's efforts, militate against a united Moro front.

The MNLF shares the Western Mindanao main theatre of operations with the ASG, and the relationship between the two has been ambivalent. Unlike the MILF, the ASG is not considered a breakaway faction of the MNLF, though most ASG founders were originally young, disaffected MNLF cadres. The MNLF has for the most part officially repudiated the ASG for its depredations, and has occasionally participated in operations against it. At the same time, kinship and other local ties between MNLF and ASG field commanders in Sulu in particular have aided ground-level tactical alliances against the common enemy, the AFP. The MNLF has not contemplated links with the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM) or the JI.

The MNLF has had ties with the Communist-led National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in the past, though these have grown weak in recent years. Links between the two groups hinged on Misuari's student activist links to Filipino Communist leader Sison and on the groups' tactical alliance in the early 1970s against Marcos's martial law regime. A high point of MNLF–NDFP collaboration was a joint presentation of their respective cases against the Marcos regime in a session before the Permanent People's Tribunal in Brussels in 1980 (Komite ng Sambayanang Pilipino, 1981). Misuari has distanced the MNLF from the NDFP in the past, especially in the eyes of the anti-Communist OIC. Sison, for his part, condemned Misuari for 'capitulation' when the MNLF entered into the 1996 Peace Agreement (Sison, 1996). Since then, Misuari and Sison have been estranged.

## Small arms and light weapons

### Stockpiles

Combatants often have personal or family firearms in addition to the organizational ones, which makes it difficult to estimate MNLF small arms holdings. Firearms are readily available in the Moro rebel milieu. While the 1996 Final Peace Agreement provided for the integration of a maximum of 7,500 MNLF elements into the AFP and PNP, it did not provide for disarmament.

MNLF integrees were invited to hand in their weapons voluntarily, but this has not substantially reduced the net number of firearms in MNLF hands.

Photographic evidence, some of it from MNLF sources, indicates that the BMA is heavily armed with a variety of largely US-designed small arms (Jane's Advisory Service, 2007). These include:

- 5.56 mm AR15 / M16 assault rifles (including M4 carbines);
- 7.62 mm M14 rifles;
- M1 Garand rifles and .30 M1 carbines;
- 7.62 mm AK47 and similar Kalashnikov-pattern assault rifles.

Recent photographic and other evidence suggests that the most common small arms system used by the MNLF is the AR-15/M16 series. Most of the M-16 pattern rifles in service with the MNLF are thought to be of the M16-A1 configuration. The 7.62 AK-47 and Kalashnikov-like assault rifles were imported from Libya in the 1970s and are now rarely used due to obsolescence and lack of ammunition.

The MNLF also has the following support weapons and crew-served weapon systems, according to MNLF official photographs taken in 2001 (Jane's Advisory Service, 2007):

- 7.62 mm M60 general purpose machine guns;
- .50 Browning M2 machine gun;
- 57 mm M18 and 90 mm M67 recoilless rifles;
- 60 mm and 81 mm mortars;
- 90 mm M67 recoilless rifles;
- RPG-2 and RPG-7 rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

The MNLF says it has not used mines since 1976, fearing civilian casualties, though some research suggests that the group has used 'improvised' anti-vehicle landmines against AFP vehicles since the 1996 ceasefire (Jane's Advisory Services, 2007). In terms of ammunition, the BMA has access to 5.56 mm, 7.62 mm, .30, and .50 ammunition typically sourced on the black market.

## Sources

The MNLF built up its arsenal in the 1970s and 1980s from three sources: US-designed weaponry seized from the security forces on the battlefield; weaponry purchased on the local black market—including 'leaked' security forces' stocks, i.e. sales from corrupt officers; and weaponry imported from Libya via Sabah, Malaysia. Weaponry from Libya included several thousand FN-FAL 7.62 mm rifles—these have since disappeared from the BMA's inventory—as well as 60 mm and 81 mm mortars and Soviet-manufactured RPG-2 rocket propelled grenade launchers. Libya also facilitated the supply of Kalashnikov AK47 assault rifles, but only a few hundred reached the MNLF because the rest of a much larger consignment was impounded by the Malaysian authorities. Continuing external funding support has allowed the MNLF to purchase arms from various sources, though not at the same levels.

The M16 has been manufactured in large numbers under licence in the Philippines. More modern variations held by the MNLF are likely to have been acquired from corrupt government and military sources. Some of these weapons are equipped with 40 mm M203 grenade launchers (Jane's Advisory Services, 2007).

Local politicians who store their private armouries with the MNLF make good any shortage of arms and ammunition. The group procures relatively small numbers of small arms and light weapons from seizures during armed hostilities with government forces or through its own production of weapons.

### Recovered

A total of 4,874 firearms—mostly old M1 Garands and carbines, but also M16s—were voluntarily turned in by MNLF integrees to the 'Balik-BARIL' (Return Gun) buy-back programme for 1996–99 (Muggah, 2004, p. 40). This is considered a low turnover in terms of both quantity and quality.

## Human security issues

### Human rights abuses

Few human rights abuses have been reported since the 1996 Peace Agreement. A number of MNLF combatants used hostages as human shields to escape the encirclement by the AFP of the Cabatangan Complex in Zamboanga City in November 2001 (Castro, 2005, pp. 358–61). During the February 2005 hostilities in Sulu, the AFP complained about MNLF conduct, which involved beheadings and other mutilations, and atrocities against innocent civilians (Mindanao Peaceweavers, 2005, p. 9).

### Children associated with fighting forces (CAFF)

MNLF Sulu Chairman Khaid O. Ajibun denies that his MNLF forces include child soldiers since, he argues, minors lack the necessary wisdom and experience to carry weapons. The other main MNLF Sulu commander, Ustadz Khabir Malik, however, has said that while children are not intended to be used as soldiers, they form members of families that have to move or be prepared for any eventuality (Mindanao Peaceweavers, 2005, p. 9).

### Gender

The MNLF is the only Moro or Muslim armed group with women in its leadership. Among the more prominent female leaders in the MNLF Central Committee are Bainon Karon, Chairperson of the National Women's Committee, and Eleonora 'Roida' Tan-Misuari, Nur's wife. No female leaders sit on the MNLF peace panel, however. There is a women's auxiliary component of the BMA. There are no reports of MNLF abuse of women.

### Displacement

The February 2005 major armed hostilities involving the AFP, the ASG, and the MNLF in Sulu resulted in the displacement of 70,000 Sulu civilians, or 15 per cent of the population. There were no civilian casualties, largely thanks to their pre-evacuation from the battle zones, notably by the MNLF (Mindanao Peaceweavers, 2005, p. 8).

## Outlook

### Capacity for negotiations

The MNLF has proved its capacity for peace negotiations, having engaged three Philippine administrations in three phases of talks. The MNLF's chief peace negotiator, Misuari, is described by GRP peace negotiators as a tough negotiator adept at brinkmanship (Kalinaw Mindanaw, 2000, pp. 123–24;

Ramos, 1996). During the 1992–96 peace negotiations, the MNLF matched the GRP in terms of staffing the five support committees for technical discussions on substantive agenda items. The MNLF was able to draw on a pool of sympathetic Moro professionals, including experienced Moro lawyers, for this and similar purposes. But Misuari deferred to the GRP on crucial constitutional limits for a negotiated political settlement. Other factors—especially the influence of the OIC—also had a bearing on Misuari's acceptance of what the GRP said was 'the most that it could offer' (Iribani, 2006).

## Prospects for the future

The MNLF no longer represents the key to a just, lasting, and comprehensive future solution to the Moro problem. It has unravelled and shown a lack of requisite leadership capabilities. It tends to revel in its 'glorious past' as the Moro vanguard. Indeed, it must be credited with placing the Moro cause on the national and international agenda, as also with the gains for this cause achieved in its 1996 Peace Agreement. But more than a decade later these gains have not fully resolved the Moro problem. A truly final solution to the Moro problem, including the more recent terrorist problem in Mindanao, will require the positive cooperation of the MNLF. In this respect, much depends on whether the MNLF leadership continues to hang on to an inadequate peace agreement that gives it some political status and hegemony, or gives way to an arrangement that is better for the Moro people. ■

# Endnotes

1 'Report and Resolutions on Political, Muslim Minorities and Communities, Legal and Information Affairs' adopted by the 27th Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (Session of Islam and Globalization), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 27–30 June 2000. Resolution No. 56/27-P 'On the Question of Muslims in Southern Philippines'. <http://mnlf.net/OIC/27_ICFM_Resolution.htm>

2 Notes written by Octavio A. Dinampo, Professor Mindanao State University (MSU)-Sulu for Soliman M. Santos, Jr., October 2006 (hereafter 'Dinampo notes of October 2006'). See also Che Man (1990, pp. 77–81).

3 Though he has been usually linked to the KM, Misuari said in an interview with Soliman M. Santos, Jr. that he eventually became attracted to the intellectuals in KM's fraternal rival activist youth organization Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (SDK, Democratic Association

of Youth), which split from KM in early 1968 (before the Jabidah Massacre). The interview took place on 23 March 2008 at Misuari's house-arrest quarters in Quezon City.

4 Dinampo notes of October 2006.

5 Khalid Al-Walid, pseudonym of an MNLF mid-level cadre, written notes for Soliman M. Santos, Jr., March 2007 (hereinafter 'Al-Walid notes of March 2007').

6 Atty. Randolph C. Parcasio, Legal Counsel, MNLF, interview by Soliman M. Santos, Jr. on 30 May 2003 in Makati City.

7 Also Soliman M. Santos, Jr., conversation with some of the 'New MNLF Leadership' including Chairman Muslimin G. Sema, on 3 April 2008 in Cotabato City.

8 Dinampo notes of October 2006.

9 Al-Walid notes of March 2007.

10 Al-Walid notes of March 2007.

11 Al-Walid notes of March 2007.

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# CHAPTER 19

# Moro Islamic Liberation Front and its Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (MILF-BIAF)

## Overview

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is the largest Philippine rebel group. Concentrated in central Mindanao in the southern Philippines, it has, for the most part, represented a radical Islamic revivalist stream which broke away from the secular-nationalist Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). It is currently involved in an ongoing peace process and ceasefire with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP), with which it is negotiating a higher form of self-determination closer to the Bangsamoro (Moro nation) aspiration for independence than the regional autonomy enshrined in the GRP–MNLF peace agreement. There have been serious recurrent hostilities between MILF forces and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)—though less frequent than before the July 2003 ceasefire. A significant near-agreement on ancestral domain was aborted in August 2008, producing another major disruption in the peace process and ceasefire.

Since 11 September 2001, the group has been accused of involvement in terrorism, particularly through the use of its camps for training foreign and local jihadi groups and the alleged participation of MILF operatives in terrorist bombings. The MILF top leadership publicly rejected terrorism in June 2003 and has subsequently cooperated with the GRP and AFP in the interdiction of criminal and terrorist elements.

## Basic characteristics

### Typology

Like the MNLF, the MILF is a Moro rebel group with ambitions that are subnational geographically but national in relation to the Moro nation. Unlike the

MNLF, however, the MILF's primary orientation is Islamic, and it has yet to enter into a final peace agreement with the GRP.

## Current status

The MILF is active and engaged in peace negotiations with the GRP.

## Origins

The MILF originated as a breakaway faction of the MNLF, led by its former Chairman for Foreign Affairs, Salamat Hashim, in 1977 after the breakdown in the GRP–MNLF peace negotiations. The split was based on differences in ideological orientation, political strategy, and ethnic allegiances, and also on personality clashes. Hashim took with him the bulk of the Maguindanao-based Kutawato Revolutionary Committee. In 1984, after some years of quiet organizational and military build-up, Hashim's faction officially declared itself a separate and distinct organization called the 'Moro Islamic Liberation Front' to emphasize its Islamic orientation.

## Aims

The MILF's official stated objective is 'to regain the illegally and immorally usurped freedom and self-determination of the Bangsamoro people' (Hashim, 2001). Such 'self-determination' ultimately means independence. Because of its Islamic orientation, the MILF's maximum long-term aspiration is the establishment of an independent Islamic state in its homeland (Hashim, 2001, pp. 83–87).

## Ideology

The MILF's official ideology is Islam, or, more precisely, radical Islamic revivalism or radical political Islamism, which advocates the Islamization of society and its political institutions, in particular the state. Hashim's main ideological influences were the political thinkers of the Islamic revival, such as Sayyid Qutb, Sayyid Abu A'la Mawdudi, Muhammad Qutb, Abdul Karim Zaidan, Ibn Taymiyyah, Shafi'i (an Islamic modernist), and Hassan al-Banna, who founded the Ikhwanul Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood).[1] Because of its roots in the MNLF, the MILF is also animated by Moro nationalism. It seeks to assert the Moro people's right to self-determination and so has increasingly made reference to international law, especially public international law and international human rights law, in its peace negotiations with the GRP. In other words, there are secular, moderating influences on current MILF thinking, and, while jihad still forms part of the vocabulary and discourse of the MILF, its ideology is not jihadi Islamism.

## Leadership

The MILF leadership has long been associated with its founder and long-standing *imam* (religious-political leader) Hashim. But, despite Hashim's undoubted pre-eminence within the group, the MILF leadership has largely been collective, embodied in the MILF Central Committee (CC). This functioning collective leadership stands out among the central committees of Philippine rebel groups— on both the Moro and the Communist fronts—reflecting an adherence to the Islamic principle of *shura* (consultation), on which Hashim placed a premium (Mansur Lingga, 1997, pp. 3, 13). The CC has tended to include members of the traditional, secular, and religious elites, though the *ulama* (religious scholars) outnumber the secular (or professional class) members of the CC and ensure its Islamic orientation.[2]

Hashim died in July 2003 and was replaced as MILF Chairman by Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, the long-standing MILF Vice-Chairman for Military Affairs, Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) Chief of Staff, and MILF Peace Panel Chairman. Murad comes from the secular elite, having trained in engineering in a Catholic university, though his father was a local Islamic teacher (Mendoza, 2002, Annex A). Other top leaders are: Vice-Chairman for Military Affairs Aleem Abdulaziz Mimbantas; long-standing Vice-Chairman for Political Affairs Ghazali Jaafar; MILF Peace Panel Chairman and long-standing Chair of the Committee on Information Mohagher Iqbal; and Advisory Body Chairman Ustadz Omar Pasigan, who is also the grand *mufti* (authoritative interpreter of Islamic law) of the Cotabato area. Jaafar and Iqbal come from the secular elite, while Mimbantas and Pasigan come from the religious elite. With the exception of Mimbantas, who comes from the Maranao ethnic group, all of the aforementioned leaders, including Hashim, come from the Maguindanao ethnic group.

## Support

### Political base

The MILF's main political base is the Bangsamoro people, especially the Islamized Maguindanao, Maranao, and Iranun ethnic groups in the central Mindanao provinces of Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Sur, and Lanao del Norte. But MILF influence extends to other sectors—including non-Muslim—and other parts of Mindanao, such as the Zamboanga peninsula and Basilan island. The MILF has no associated political party, as it considers itself to be outside the Philippine political system, though some of its leaders have associations with the largely inactive Islamic Party of the Philippines.

### Combatants and constituency

Combatants are drawn mainly from young, able-bodied Moro men in the above areas, especially in conflict-affected and internally displaced communities.[3] The group claims to have convened nearly 3 million people at the 2005 MILF General Consultation, and over 1 million and 2.6 million, respectively, at the Bangsamoro People's Consultative Assembly mobilizations in 1996 and 2001 (Hamza, 2005; Vitug, 2005; MILF, 2001). The Moro or Muslim population in Mindanao numbers approximately 4 million; the MILF claims that the level of participation at its consultations gives it a mandate from the Bangsamoro people. The MILF claims that more than three-quarters of Moro communities support MILF leadership of the Moro struggle for freedom and self-determination, and 'ethnicity and geographic representation are no longer at issue'.[4]

### Sources of financing and other support

An AFP high official once outlined the sources of logistics support to the MILF in 2000 as follows:

- *Zakat* (obligatory alms of Muslims) collections and extortion activities (main source of funding);
- financial support from foreign sources, particularly Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other Islamic nations;
- remittances of Muslim Filipino overseas workers who are members of the United Overseas Bangsamoro; and

MILF fighters perform war exercises in their camp in Dinaig, Maguindanao, December 2007.
© Arthur C. Fuentes/SSN

- diversion of funds intended for socio-religious and humanitarian purposes from foreign Islamic NGOs (Reyes, 2000, pp. 180–81).

The MILF claims to be financially self-reliant and, of course, denies any illegal or criminal sourcing of funds, as it 'strictly discourages un-Islamic means of acquiring resources/support'.[5] According to Jaafar:

> *we have not received funds from foreign countries with preconditions for military activity. We have been receiving contributions from people of the world, some people in Saudi Arabia and Middle East countries, but these moneys are given in sympathy for the Bangsamoro cause with no strings attached.*[6]

## Military activities

### Size and strength

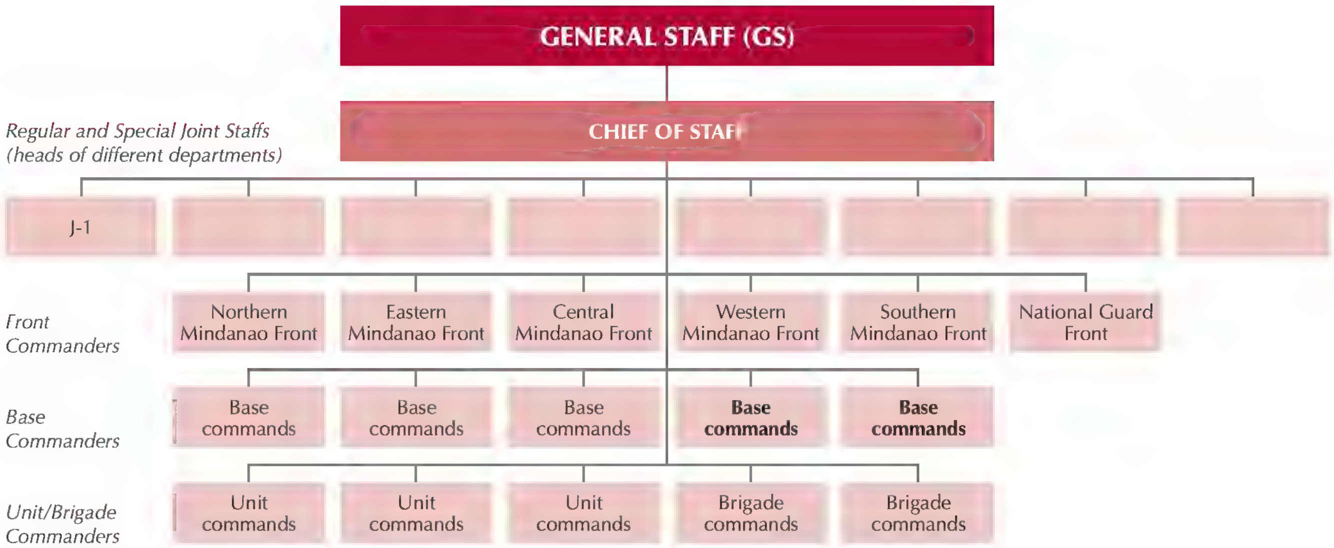
The AFP's 2007 official estimate of MILF strength is 11,769 fighters, making it the biggest rebel group in the Philippines (AFP, 2008). The MILF says 'about 45,000 elements are fully armed combatants, supported by tens of thousands of armed guerrillas.'[7] Despite its strength, the Philippine government considers the MILF—which is geographically confined and is engaging in peace talks—as less of a current threat than the Communist-led New People's Army (NPA), which operates nationwide, and even than the much smaller Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which operates mainly in south-west Mindanao.

### Command and control

The MILF has its own army, called the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), commanded by the MILF CC via its Chairman, who is also commander-in-chief. The BIAF has its own Chief of Staff, currently Sammy Al Mansour (Sammy Gambar).[8]

The BIAF has a military chain of command much like a regular army (see Figure 19.1). There are currently 22 base commands, according to the BIAF, though the AFP only lists 15.[9] The base commanders—mostly former division commanders—'now enjoy more autonomy from the General Staff . . . as do lower-level commanders vis-à-vis the base commands' (ICG, 2004, p. 10). A key part of what is described as a 'reorganization' of the BIAF is the establishment of five territorial fronts covering northern, eastern, central, western,

Figure 19.1 **BIAF organizational structure**


GENERAL STAFF (GS)
CHIEF OF STAFF
Regular and Special Joint Staffs
(heads of different departments)
J-1
Front Commanders
Northern Mindanao Front
Eastern Mindanao Front
Central Mindanao Front
Western Mindanao Front
Southern Mindanao Front
National Guard Front
Base Commanders
Base commands
Base commands
Base commands
Base commands
Base commands
Unit/Brigade Commanders
Unit commands
Unit commands
Unit commands
Brigade commands
Brigade commands

**Notes:**

1. The General Staff is a collegial body composed of the Chief of Staff and all the Regular and Special Staffs, which, when expanded, include the Front Commanders.

2. The areas of responsibility (AORs) of the Front Commands are as follows: Northern Mindanao Front (NMF): Lanao provinces, part of Bukidnon, part of Misamis, and the cities situated therein; Central Mindanao Front (CMF): part of Maguindanao province and part of Cotabato province and the cities situated therein; Eastern Mindanao Front (EMF): part of Maguindanao, part of Cotabato, part of Bukidnon, Davao provinces, and Compostela Valley and the cities situated therein except in Bukidnon; Western Mindanao Front (WMF): part of Lanao, Zamboanga Peninsula, and Island provinces and the cities situated therein; Southern Mindanao Front (SMF): part of Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat province, South Cotabato, and Saranggani, and the cities situated therein except Cotabato; National Guard Front (NGF): no specific AOR but responsible for safeguarding headquarters and the MILF leadership.

3. Base Commands are assigned an area within the AOR of their Front Command. They have direct control over the unit (guerrilla) and brigade (conventional) commands assigned to them.

**Source:** Provided by BIAF in February 2009 and southern Mindanao. Since 2006, the BIAF has had a 'Code of Conduct' regulating its affairs and prescribing its powers, duties, and functions (BIAF, 2005). Aside from the basic Muslim obligations, it has adopted the traditional articles of war for military discipline.

Though organized as a regular army, with uniforms and distinctive patches, many BIAF 'regulars' are really part-timers. A recent field visit to the MILF's 'satellite' Camp Bader used for training and as first line of defence for a larger camp revealed the presence of about 300 mujahideens who 'look well equipped, trained and tough' (Scarpello, 2007). They are part of a 700-man battalion, which is rotated every week. The daily routine calls for physical exercise, military training, and the five compulsory Muslim prayer sessions. When not in training, the men return to their villages, families, and farm work. Most of the battalion's food is provided by nearby villagers, whose support for the Moro cause is palpable (Scarpello, 2007). The BIAF is also supported by guerrilla units operating under the central command.[10]

The ICG has reported some weak links in MILF-BIAF command, specifically involving the 103rd, 106th, 108th, and 109th Base Commands, which suggests that the Maguindanaon-controlled leadership might have more success imposing discipline on fellow Maguindanaon commanders rather than on the Maranao and Iranun base commands (ICG, 2005, p. 16).

## Areas of operation

The MILF controls communities in central Mindanao, Lanao region, southwest Zamboanga Peninsula, and Basilan and mass bases in Tawi-Tawi, Sulu, and southern Palawan. It has influence in Davao region, South Cotabato-Saranggani, and General Santos City. Its areas of activity are the provinces of Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao Sur and Lanao Norte, Zamboanga Peninsula, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, Sulu and Palawan, Davao Oriental, Davao Norte, Davao Sur, and Bukidnon.[11]

## Strategy and tactics

Since the 1997 ceasefire agreement, the MILF has given primacy to peace negotiations, supported by armed strength. For the most part, the BIAF has been respecting the ceasefire, which it reiterated in 2003.

During its early years, the MILF was able to build up its military capability quietly as part of a four-point programme, which also included Islamization, organizational strengthening, and logistical self-reliance. By the mid-1980s, it had a firm network of at least seven major camps, which served as bases for training and operations.[12] With these fixed camps, the MILF was oriented to semi-conventional warfare, including positional warfare against the AFP. The group shifted to a more mobile guerrilla mode after it lost all its fixed camps in the 'all-out war' in 2000. It still uses field camps under its current system of base commands, but these are more remote and hidden than previously (Vitug, 2002, pp. 5–7).

In addition, the MILF engages in domestic alliance building and in international diplomatic work, especially in relation to the peace process (Vitug, 2006). Finally, it convenes occasional massive assemblies as a show of popular force and mandate.

## Collaboration with other armed groups

The main collaboration is with the MNLF. There is an ongoing MILF–MNLF unity process at the MILF's initiative, focused on convergence on a common agenda and objective rather than organizational unification or merger. Long-time animosities arising from the 1977 MNLF–MILF split hamper the unity process, however, as does the fact that the groups have different frameworks for the Mindanao peace process—the MILF is pushing for a higher form of Moro self-determination (see Chapter 3). As a result of the GRP–MNLF peace agreement, some MNLF leaders have become government officials, and many former MNLF fighters have been integrated into the AFP, sometimes clashing with MILF forces in field hostilities.

The MILF has not had the same fraternal relationship with the ASG, even though both are Islamist. There have been reports of cooperation between 'weak link' field commanders on the ground, and some ASG and MILF elements have undergone military training together in various camps, both abroad and locally, including at MILF camps. The MILF has condemned the ASG as 'un-Islamic' for its acts of terrorism. In 2002, the MILF agreed to assist the government with interdiction of criminal elements, not only from criminal groups, such as the Pentagon Gang, but from terrorist groups, including the ASG and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI).

In recent years, the most controversial of the MILF's possible collaborations has been with JI. Initially connected through reported personal ties between Hashim and JI leaders Abdullah Sungkar and Zulkarnaen, the MILF allegedly allowed JI to use MILF camps as training venues and sanctuaries in exchange for JI support with training, expertise, finance, networking, and alliance-building. Some bombing operations have reportedly involved JI and MILF or MILF-associated elements (ICG, 2004; Madani, 2004). For example, senior JI operative Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi and the commanding officer of the Special Operations Group of the MILF's 3rd Division, Muklis Yunos, reportedly collaborated in the Rizal Day 2000 terrorist bombings in metro Manila (Gloria, 2002). But shortly before his death Hashim issued a MILF policy statement rejecting terrorism and terrorist links, and his successor, Murad, has made efforts to distance the MILF from JI.

A 2008 ICG report, citing intelligence sources, suggests that, despite the MILF leadership's consistent denial of terrorist ties, 'there is ample evidence' that some MILF commanders are still 'collaborating with the ASG' and its foreign jihadi allies. Mugasid Delna (aka Abu Badrin), commander of a MILF camp known as SKP in the Liguasan Marsh and said to be a classmate of Umar Patek at a jihadi training camp in Afghanistan, is described as 'perhaps the MILF's most important link with foreign *jihadis*' (ICG, 2008, p. 5).

There is currently a formal tactical alliance between the MILF and the Communist-led National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), whose armed wing—the NPA—operates in the Christian areas of Mindanao. This was formalized in a document signed in 1999,[13] which Murad says is aimed at avoiding confrontations in the field and 'limited to the defense of common areas . . . [excluding] exchanges of training and transfer of technology'.[14] An unofficial police intelligence report from 2007 suggests that the alliance does, in fact, include joint military operations and training—specifically on bombs and demolitions and transfer of weapons technology, in particular for RPGs.[15] The NDFP has, in recent years, publicly urged the MILF to resume its armed struggle.

## Small arms and light weapons

### Stockpiles

The AFP's 2006 official estimate of the MILF's firearms holdings is 8,170, made up overwhelmingly of US-designed weapons (Esperon, 2006, p. 6). The most common are 5.56 mm M-16s/AR15s and newer M4 carbines, though M203 40 mm grenade launchers are also common. The BIAF also uses older, Vietnam-era US-manufactured weaponry, including 7.62 mm M14 rifles and M79 40 mm grenade launchers. Some of the 3,000 firearms that the MILF took when it broke away from the MNLF are probably also in service, including 7.62 mm FN-FAL automatic rifles supplied by Libya in the 1970s. Other older small arms that continue to be used are .30 Garand rifles and .30 M1 and M2 carbines (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007).

The ubiquitous anti-tank RPG-2s as well as the 60 and 81 mm mortars are the trademark weapons of the MILF-BIAF and distinguish it as the most heavily armed among non-state armed groups in the Philippines (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007). They also reflect the MILF tradition of semi-conventional and positional warfare. Recent news photographs show that the MILF now has the .50 Barrett Sniper Rifle in its arsenal. The MILF's long-claimed possession of surface-to-air missiles or Man-Portable Air Defense Systems has so far not been borne out by photographic or field evidence, however. Use by the BIAF of the 7.62 mm M60 general purpose machine-gun is fairly common, and the insurgents also hold a smaller number of Browning .50 M2 heavy machine guns. These constitute the BIAF's only real anti-aircraft capability (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007). Among the handguns used by the MILF are the .45 Colt and .38 Smith & Wesson (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007).

During the AFP 'all-out war' against the MILF in 2000, various AFP accounts suggested that MILF stockpiles included millions of rounds of ammunition, stocks of C-4 explosives and dynamite, and landmines—both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle—usually improvised and contact-detonated (Cal, 2000).

The MILF claims to have a far larger arsenal than that suggested by military intelligence or by independent observers. In March 1997, a MILF senior official stated that the group held 70,000–80,000 assorted assault rifles (M14

MILF fighters in Pikit, North Cotabato, lean their weapons against a hut as they take a break from the drills of the day, December 2007. © Arthur C. Fuentes/SSN

and M16), machine guns (.30, .50, and .60), mortars (60 and 81 mm), and anti-tank weapons.[16]

## Sources

The MILF says its small arms come from purchases from both 'armed contraband and civilian dealers', captures or seizures during armed hostilities with government forces, shipments from foreign bases, and its own production of weapons.[17]

The quality of craft production by the MILF-BIAF is a cut above that of the other non-state armed groups. A senior MILF official said in 1997 that the group's 'small' and 'modest' arms factory could supply M79 grenade launchers, pistols, improvised M14 automatic rifles copied from the US Garand rifle, mortars (60 mm and 81 mm), and anti-tank weapons.[18] Other sources say the RPG-2 is the only weapon of any significance that the group has succeeded in manufacturing locally and even then with variable quality and durability and problems with ammunition supply (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007). According to AFP accounts of captured MILF arms factories and sources during the 'all-out war' of 2000:

> *The MILF was on its way to developing anti-armor weapon technology . . . the rebels had procured their sophisticated weapons and ammunition from abroad, particularly Europe . . . the troops that overrun [Camp] Abubukar found equipment used for the manufacture of weapons at the MILF arsenal . . .* (Cal, 2000, pp. 6–7)

> *We found lathe machines and other paraphernalia indicating that they had been producing their own rocket tubes. They had the technology already . . .* (Cal, 2000, p. 16)

The MILF said, as early as 1996, that 'on several occasions, [it] received arms shipments from abroad', but it does not appear to have ever secured a steady flow of external weapons supplies (Iqbal, 1996, p. 6). Since then, there have been occasional reports of arms shipments moved ashore from small fishing vessels—primarily off the Illana Bay coastline north of Cotabato and the Malabang and Sultan Gumander coastline in Lanao del Sur. According to one August 2004 news report citing an unnamed senior defence department official:

> *the MILF had received* 1,190 *automatic rifles and hundreds of thousands of ammunition rounds in two shipments that arrived in Palembang town, Sultan Kudarat province, and Kapatagan town in Lanao del [Norte] province . . . the first of four planned deliveries this year . . . The MILF was also trying to acquire several heavy machine guns and mortars.* (Reuters, 2004)

Reports have also emerged that, from 1999 to 2002, North Korea sold more than 10,000 rifles and other weapons to the MILF through a third country, believed to be Malaysia, but this—and indeed any connection at all with the government of North Korea—was denied by Murad in a press statement (Murad, 2005). There is no evidence to suggest that the MILF has succeeded in importing new weaponry from regional sources in recent years.

### Recovered

Data from the AFP Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence indicate that total number of firearms gained by the AFP from the MILF in battle in 1996–2000 was 744, of which 401 were obtained in 2000. Over the same period, the AFP lost 190 firearms to the MILF. The total number of firearms surrendered to the AFP by MILF elements for the period is 1,965. This brings total recoveries by the AFP of MILF firearms for that period to 2,709.[19] Virtually every type of weapon listed above has been recovered.

## Human security issues

### Human rights abuses

The MILF counter-offensive to the AFP's 2003 'Buliok offensive'—in particular, the MILF-BIAF attacks on Maigo and Kolambugan towns in Lanao del Norte and Siocon town in Zamboanga del Norte—resulted in the deaths of many civilians, some of whom were used as human shields by the MILF-BIAF, as well as in looting and cattle-rustling (Gallardo, 2003). MILF Chairman Hashim apologized for 'whatever excesses' were committed by MILF members, and the MILF CC assumed responsibility for the civilian deaths on the basis that it had initiated the attack (MILF Central Committee, 2003).

Several human rights abuses were perpetrated by MILF units during the attacks on Christian civilian communities by three so-called 'rogue' MILF-BIAF base commanders in August 2008, including: using guns and machetes to kill villagers in their homes or on the streets; using civilian hostages as human shields and sometimes subjecting them to torture; burning houses, schools, and businesses; and looting.[20]

### Children associated with fighting forces (CAFF)

Photographic evidence and news reports indicate that the MILF uses child soldiers. The AFP says children have been captured, killed, or have surrendered in its confrontations with the MILF-BIAF (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004, pp. 32–33). MILF guerrillas interviewed by the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1999 admitted having fighters as young as ten years among their ranks, though these children were supposedly reserve forces confined to camps for their education (Makinano, 2002, p. 35). The MILF has consistently claimed that children are not forced to join its ranks and that they are being trained militarily but cannot join combat units (Camacho, 2003, p. 50). The MILF states that, among Muslims, children are considered mature when they reach 'the age of reason' at puberty—around 12–13 for girls and 13–14 for boys (MILF, 2006).

A boy still in his early teens trains to become a member of the MILF in December 2007 in Maguindanao. The MILF claims that, while it trains young boys in firearms and battle tactics, it does not send them into battle. © Arthur C. Fuentes/SSN

Senior MILF leaders received Radhika Coomaraswamy, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, in December 2008 to start a process of engagement on the future of 'children of war', i.e. those who have come under the care of the MILF after their parents were killed in the course of the conflict or live with their parents who are in MILF camps (MILF Committee on Information, 2008).

### Gender

The lack of visible female leaders is even more pronounced with the MILF than with the MNLF, which reflects the patriarchal nature of both Moro society and purist Islam. The MILF has a special agency—the Social Welfare Committee—to cater to the representation and needs of women. Women are not allowed to serve as combatants, though the BIAF has a Bangsamoro Women Islamic Auxiliary (BIWA) which assists with medical, communication, and other auxiliary needs.[21] Photos of the BIWA in the MILF-controlled *Homeland* magazine show women bearing or training with assault rifles, however. There are no reports of MILF abuses of women. The MILF's general conservatism towards women's rights is illustrated by a CC resolution prohibiting the entire MILF officialdom from participating in activities dealing with reproductive health and family planning.[22]

### Displacement

In the worst case so far—the 'all-out war' of 2000—as many as 738,000 people were internally displaced, mainly in the MILF heartland in Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Sur, and Lanao del Norte, according to the government's Department of Social Welfare and Development.[23] In the more recent hostilities of August 2008, the cumulative figure for displaced persons reached nearly 612,000 as of early October 2008 (AI, 2008, p. 15).

## Outlook

### Capacity for negotiations

The MILF has shown a willingness to prioritize peace negotiations as the main avenue for achieving its aims. A good indication of this is the seriousness with which it constituted its peace panels and the obvious preparation for the negotiations.

## Prospects for the future

The MILF currently offers the best chance among armed groups on the Moro front of achieving a negotiated political settlement of the decades-old Moro rebellion—if not the centuries-old Moro problem. Success hinges on the ongoing MILF–MNLF unity process and on the MILF being able to achieve an improved self-determination arrangement for the Moro people. Clinching the peace process on the Moro front is also the key to strategic progress on the counter-terrorism front, i.e. with the ASG and the JI.

A potential problem relating to the Moro front—aside from the tendency to fragmentation and factionalism among Moro rebel groups—is the renaissance of the traditional Moro political clans, notably the Ampatuan clan of Maguindanao (Bagayaua, 2005; Arguillas, 2006). Also important to consider is the 'tri-people' character of Mindanao, which includes the Lumads (indigenous highlander tribes) and the Christian settler majority, both of which have expressed strong concerns about Moro territorial claims. ■

## Endnotes

1 Salamat Hashim, written answers to research interview questions by Soliman M. Santos, Jr., on 8 February 1999 from Maguindanao, Philippines. Mansur Lingga (1995) describes Hashim's political thought.

2 Ghazali Jaafar, MILF Vice-Chairman for Political Affairs, interviewed by Soliman M. Santos, Jr. on 26 August 2006 in Crossing Simuay, Sultan Kudarat, Shariff Kabunsuan province, Philippines.

3 Mohagher Iqbal, Chairman, Committee on Information, Central Committee, MILF, interview by SSN field researcher Romy Elusfa on 18 June 2006 in Cotabato City (hereinafter 'Iqbal interview by Elusfa'). The information herein was validated by MILF Vice-Chairman for Political Affairs Ghazali Jaafar in February 2007.

4 Iqbal interview by Elusfa.

5 Iqbal interview by Elusfa.

6 Ghazali Jaafar, interview by the Mindanao People's Congress for Peace and Development (MPCPD) on 25 March 1997 in Crossing Simuay, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao (now Shariff Kabunsuan) (hereafter 'Jaafar interview by MPCPD').

7 Iqbal interview by Elusfa.

8 Iqbal interview by Elusfa.

9 Information given to the author by Mohagher Iqbal, MILF Committee of Information Chair, in February 2009.

10 Iqbal interview by Elusfa.

11 Iqbal interview by Elusfa.

12 ICG (2004, p. 5), citing Che Man (1990, p. 93).

13 From a confidential unofficial police intelligence report on the CPP/NPA/NDFP-MILF alliance, p. 88. The document is entitled 'Over-all Agreement Between the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front about the Mutual Cooperation and Support With Each Other Within the Revolutionary Struggle', and dated 24 July 2007.

14 Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, MILF Chairman, letter to Atty. Soliman M. Santos, Jr., Coordinator, Philippine Campaign to Ban Landmines, dated 26 March 2004, rebutting a claim in a news item to the effect that MILF guerrillas were helping the NPA guerrillas manufacture explosives, landmines, and M79 rifle grenades in Mindoro Island far north of Mindanao.

15 From a confidential unofficial police intelligence report in 2007 on the CPP/NPA/NDFP-MILF alliance, p. 126.

16 Jaafar interview by MPCPD.

17 Iqbal interview by Elusfa.

18 Jaafar interview by MPCPD.

19 National Security Council Secretariat, 'MILF Quick-Look Indicators' for 1996 to 2000.

20 Based on several independent fact-finding mission reports starting in August 2008 by NGO entities such as Bantay Ceasefire, Amnesty International, Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement, and Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates.

21 Iqbal interview by Elusfa.

22 Resolution of the Central Committee of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) during its special meeting on 23 March 2004 at Camp Abubakre As-Siddique.

23 Iqbal interview by Elusfa.

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## CHAPTER 20

# Al-Harakatul Al-Islamiyya, aka Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

### Overview

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which calls itself Al-Harakatul Islamiyya (Islamic Movement), is a Moro Islamic jihadist rebel group, composed mainly of young members of the Tausug, Yakan, and Sama ethnic groups in Western Mindanao, with some bandit elements. The group uses terrorism in its quest for an independent Islamic state in the whole of Mindanao. It is currently considered the top internal terrorist threat in the Philippines, in association with at least two other terrorist groups, the mainly Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the Filipino Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM). Since gaining notoriety in 1991, it has been the target of major military operations—sometimes with US military participation—including one beginning in the second half of 2006 in Jolo Island in Sulu. (For a more detailed discursive treatment of the ASG, see Chapter 5.)

### Basic characteristics

#### Typology

The ASG is a rebel group with subnational ambitions.

#### Current status

The ASG is active and engaged in armed hostilities with Philippine government forces, which now operate with US military support.

#### Origins

The ASG was formed in mid-1989 when it was established by its founding ideologue, the late Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, and several other disenchanted young cadres of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the Basilan island province. They questioned MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari's 1986 peace negotiation efforts with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and later his failure to appropriate Islamic concepts of jihad for the Moro struggle. Janjalani and his associates had recently returned from Islamic schooling in Libya as well as practical exposure in the jihad of resistance against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s.[1]

## Aims

The stated objective of the ASG is to achieve an independent Islamic state in the whole of Mindanao and Sulu (Tan, 1995, p. 96).

## Ideology

The ideology of the ASG is Islamic jihadist or radical Islamic revivalist (see Chapter 5).

## Leadership

The first *amir* (leader) of the ASG was its founder Abdurajak A. Janjalani (also known as Abu Sayyaf). He was killed in a police raid in December 1998 and was succeeded by his youngest brother Khadaffy A. Janjalani (Abu Mochtar). Early in the group's history, military agents in the ASG leadership, such as Edwin Angeles (Ibrahim Yakub), were killed. In more recent years, bandit-type leaders, such as former spokesman Aldam Tilao (Abu Sabaya) and Ghalib Andang (Commander Robot), have been killed. In a sense, these later deaths represented a 'cleansing' of the ASG leadership and a return to its Moro rebel and Islamic jihadist roots. The deaths in battle of Khadaffy and his top lieutenant and spokesman Jainal Antel Sali, Jr. (Abu Solaiman) in September 2006 and January 2007, respectively, ushered in a new era for the ASG. According to Sulu sources, the mantle of overall ASG leadership has finally fallen to the one-armed, sickly, aging ASG Sulu commander Radullan Sahiron (Commander Putol), who reportedly came close to being killed by the Philippine marines in Sulu in December 2008.

Several names associated with the more operational or day-to-day functioning of the ASG under the aegis of Sahiron are: the relatively young professional

Yasser Igasan; Tuan Awliya, who is one of the original ASG members; and Basilan ASG leader Isnilon Totoni Hapilon (Abu Musab).[2] The well-established set-up of two main ASG groups, each with its own local leaders or commanders—one in Sulu and the other in Basilan—is likely to continue. The centre of this set-up is currently Sulu.

Some observers say a new and younger generation of leaders is slowly taking over; a government security report has named Albader Parad and Sulaiman Pattah in Sulu and Nurhassan Jamiri and Furuji Indama in Basilan as among the new leaders. Parad was a follower of the late Commander Robot, who was more of a bandit than a rebel or terrorist (Associated Press, 2009). Other observers doubt that these are the 'new faces' of the group and claim they have had dubious links with the government or even military intelligence.[3]

REWARD UP TO
$200,000
TERRORIST
MURDERER
Radullan Sahiron
(aka Commander Putol)

A poster offers a reward for ASG leader Radullan Sahiron. Sahiron was responsible for the kidnapping of author Octavio Dinampo and television broadcaster Ces Drilon in June 2008. © Therence Koh/AFP

## Support

### Political base

The political base is primarily the youth, rural poor, and kinship networks among the Tausug, Yakan, and Sama ethnic groups—which are among the Islamized Moro tribes—in western Mindanao, particularly in the provinces of Sulu, Basilan, and the Zamboanga peninsula.

### Combatants and constituency

The ASG's combatants and constituency are practically the same as the political base profile. Recruitment is voluntary and tends to be along lines of kinship and village networks, though motivations for joining are mixed, including ideological commitment or opposition to the state, personal enrichment, machismo, and even physical survival.[4] The level of popular support for the ASG in its areas of operation has varied over time and across geographical locations, but the fact that the group has survived major military operations for at least 15 years indicates a significant level of support—without discounting the role terror plays. The promise of a share of ransom money has attracted some supporters in parts of western Mindanao described as 'the wild west of the south', though the group's excesses have alienated other potential Moro supporters, especially in Central Mindanao.

### Sources of financing and other support

The ASG initially acquired funds from kidnapping and from extorting 'protection money' from businesspeople, teachers, politicians, and other professionals. They also received substantial support from countries in the Middle East (Torres, 2001, pp. 39, 41). According to some accounts, al-Qaeda sponsored the formation of the ASG, providing PHP 6 million (USD 130,000) via the charity International Islamic Relief Organization headed by Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law Mohammed Jamal Khalifa.[5] In 2000–02, the ASG staged two major hostage-takings of Westerners—Sipadan and Dos Palmas—which brought huge ransom proceeds (Aventajado, 2003). At that time, the foreign and local media were also sources of exorbitant fees charged by the ASG in exchange for news, interviews, photos, and footage. The ASG's shift away from kidnapping after 2004 suggested a possible renewal of funding from international terrorist links, such as JI, but in 2008 ASG-related kidnappings resumed with a vengeance, targeting even humanitarian, development, and peace workers (Doyo, 2008). A police terrorism expert recently listed the sources of ASG financing from 1992 to 2007 as: (a) kidnap-for-ransom (PHP 1.4 billion, USD 34 million); (2) share of the *zakat* (Muslim alms tax) (PHP 20 million, USD 487,000); (3) Islamic NGO fronting (PHP 10 million, USD 243,000); and (4) extortion (PHP 10 million, USD 243,000) (Papa, 2008; Mendoza, 2008).[6]

## Military activities

### Size and strength

From some 650 members in the early 1990s, the ASG was believed to have grown to almost 3,000 fighters after the Sipadan hostage crisis in 2000, when it had hefty ransom proceeds to distribute (Torres, 2001, p. 38). By 2005, the Philippine Anti-Terrorism Task Force (ATTF) estimated ASG strength to be no more than 350. An army brigade commander involved in the February 2005 hostilities in Jolo Island estimated that there were 300 ASG combatants on the island (Pajarito, 2005). The figures are broadly in line with military intelligence and defence department estimates of 409 and 500, respectively, in 2006 (Banlaoi, 2006b, p. 253). A top ASG commander in Sulu said in early 2006 that the group had 650 fully-armed regulars and thousands more tactical reserves.[7]

### Command and control

The political and military leadership is one and the same. The exit of bandit-type leaders, such as Abu Sabaya and Commander Robot, resulted in the consolidation of Khadaffy Janjalani's leadership and the re-emergence of an Islamic jihadi mode. In terms of overall politico-military organization, there is no hierarchical command structure or chain of command, though this appears to have been attempted. There does not appear to be a fully functioning centralized collective leadership; the focus of decision-making, planning, and operations has been largely devolved to the island group level, especially in Basilan and Sulu.

The ASG has been described as 'a lean, loose, decentralized, highly motivated organization', well adapted to its uncertain environment, operating in loosely coupled groups, which gather around particular leaders. Internal coordination is facilitated by trust, underpinning a group that is 'low on complexity, has little formalization, and authority centralized in a single person', has low specialization in the division of labour, and a minimal hierarchy (Turner, 2003, pp. 387, 397–98). The ASG typically operates in small units, appropriate for a life constantly on the move. The Philippine military says the ASG's basic organization for combat consists of three groupings: a forward security element, a main body, and a rear security element. Leaders, regulars, and hostages, if any, make up the main body, while paid recruits and other trusted supporters make up the two security elements (Philippine Marine Corps, 2002, p. 18).

The ASG in Basilan has been reported to be more hierarchical and centralized than its counterpart in Sulu, which is formed of community or kin groups that form alliances for specific purposes.[8]

## Areas of operation

The ASG has mainly operated in the island provinces of Basilan and Sulu as well as the three-province Zamboanga peninsula—basically western Mindanao. Within these mainly rural areas, its strongholds include the Sampinit Complex in Upper Kapayaoan, in the Basilan municipality of Isabela, where the ASG once had a permanent base, including Camp Al-Madinah; Punoh (Mount) Mohaji in the strategic centre of Basilan, where the ASG once had a headquarters called Camp Abdurajak; the Sulu bailiwicks of Radullan Sahiron in Patikul municipality; Dr. Abu's Karawan Complex in the Indanan-Parang-Maimbung municipalities tri-boundary; and the late Commander Robot's strongholds in Talipao municipality. The ASG has been able to perpetrate bombings as well as seek temporary haven in some areas of mainland Central Mindanao that are traditionally associated with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). In more recent times, the ASG has set off bombs in the capital region of Manila.

## Strategy and tactics

In the simplest terms, the ASG employs a small group strategy of hitting, running, and hiding. Given its limited strength, it relies on concentrated firepower, speed, agility, detailed planning, and knowledge of the terrain to outmanoeuvre the enemy.[9] If necessary to avoid death or capture, ASG fighters are able to merge back into their own environment, making military pursuit difficult, especially as it would be difficult to avoid harming civilians who might then become more sympathetic to the ASG (Turner, 2003, pp. 398–99). From its early days, the group has practised counter-offensive diversionary tactics whereby secondary units attack military forces to divert attention from a more important unit facing a military offensive (Turner, 1995, pp. 1, 6). It avoids direct confrontation with the military, unless threatened. Movement is always under the cover of darkness, off established roads and trails, and with the support of the local population. The best testament to the efficacy of its techniques is the fact that it survived—and inflicted casualties against—a six-month Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) operation in Sulu, involving some 8,000 troops and high-tech US military support, starting in August 2006 (ICG, 2008, p. 9). This operation did, however, succeed in killing Khadaffy Janjalani and his top lieutenant Abu Solaiman.

Because of the island and peninsula region where the ASG operates, it has made extensive use of fast watercraft for general transportation, kidnapping operations, raids, and escape (Philippine Marine Corps, 2002, p. 33). It has also carried out bombings of passenger vessels at port and at sea (Banlaoi, 2005a; 2006a). The ASG reportedly once had an 'Urban Terrorist Group' that conducted some 70 motorcycle assassinations and kidnap-murders in Jolo town in the six months prior to August 2006, targeting wealthy urban Christians rather than the villagers and foreigners who were the early targets of the group (ICG, 2008, pp. 9–10).

High-impact terrorist bombings and kidnappings have given the ASG at least three kinds of dividend disproportionate to its small size and armed strength: media coverage for the group and its propaganda, economic sabotage of the state, and proceeds from extortion or ransom. 'Another possible consequence, if not objective, is the fomenting of Muslim–Christian tensions and polarization' (Philippine Marine Corps, 2002, p. 33). The group is less concerned with winning popular mass support for its struggle than in pursuing what it perceives as the correct 'straight path' ordained by Allah—jihad.

## Collaboration with other armed groups

The groups working most closely with the ASG in recent times are the foreign jihadi group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the local Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM), a jihadi group of militant Islamic converts. This collaboration was highlighted by the Superferry 14 bombing of February 2004 and the Valentine's Day bombings in three cities in February 2005. According to the International Crisis Group, 'the ASG-RSM-JI link is mutually beneficial in several ways. RSM and ASG get the direct benefit of JI expertise and technical assistance. JI and the ASG get new field operatives' (ICG, 2005, p. 1). The ASG is the fulcrum of this triangular relationship. Marriage also links certain ASG and RSM top leaders (Banloai, 2005b). In 2006, it was the ASG in Sulu—rather than the larger MILF in Central Mindanao, which has distanced itself from both JI and the ASG—that hosted and protected so-called JI operatives, such as Umar Patek and Dulmatin, though it could be more accurately described as a group of 'free-lance' jihadis from Indonesian groups, such as Darul Islam and KOMPAK (see Chapter 5).

Al-Qaeda played a limited role in the ASG's early history through the exposure of some of its future leaders to the Afghan jihad of resistance against Soviet occupation and, possibly, provision of money and training (see Chapter 5).

Although there is no official alliance between the ASG and the MNLF in Sulu, some unofficial tactical alliances on the ground reflect the fact that the original leaders of the ASG came from the ranks of the MNLF; that they have a common military enemy; and that they share ethnic, community, and kinship ties. Alliances have mainly taken the form of the ASG seeking temporary refuge in MNLF areas, though have occasionally involved concerted military operations against the AFP. The MNLF shifted policy in the 2006 hostilities in Sulu, actively cooperating with the AFP against the ASG.

There is currently no relationship between the ASG and the MILF at the institutional level, and the MILF has publicly condemned the ASG as 'un-Islamic' for its acts of terrorism and kidnapping. There appear, however, to have been 'weak links' between the ASG and rogue MILF units and field commanders who are ideological hardliners or otherwise sceptical about of the peace process.

## Small arms and light weapons

### Stockpiles

AFP intelligence sources estimate that the number of small arms held by the ASG averaged only 363 a year in the period 1996–2002.[10] An ASG fighting unit would typically have more firepower than an equivalent unit of the New People's Army (NPA) but arguably less than an MILF unit. In addition, the ASG has employed improvised landmines or explosive devices, especially in the anti-personnel mode, for perimeter defence of its jungle and mountain camp.[11]

Photographic evidence, accounts of ASG hostages, and armed forces' intelligence suggest that the ASG arsenal includes:[12]

- various types of handgun;
- 5.56 mm Cold AR15/M16 series rifles and carbines, which are likely to be of the M4 or M16A1 series and frequently equipped with 40 mm M203 grenade launchers and 7.62 mm M14 assault rifles;
- 30 cal. M-1 Garand; 7.62 mm M60 and the latest Ultimax light machine guns;
- .30 and .50 heavy machine guns;
- 80 mm RPG-2 or B40 rocket-propelled grenades;
- 57 mm M18 and 90 M67 mm recoilless rifles; and
- 60 mm and 81 mm mortars.

The ASG may hold some of the 7.62 mm AK47s that reached the MNLF via the Libyan pipeline through Sabah, East Malaysia, in the 1970s, but they are unlikely to be in use due to age and the lack of available Kalashnikov ammunition in the southern Philippines.

Improvised bombs and explosive devices used in terror attacks have, for the most part, been made with readily available ammonium nitrate. The group has access to 60 mm and 81 mm mortar shells for improvised explosive devices detonated as time bombs or by mobile phone. The ASG's technical capacity in bomb making has improved in recent times, which can be attributed to JI training. This technology transfer appears to include truck bombs, liquid bombs made of C-4 mixed with kerosene, 8 mm ball-bearing projectiles, and electronic anti-tamper sensors. Bomb-making equipment and explosives have been recovered from captured ASG jungle camps in Sulu as well as in raided safehouses in metro Manila (Pazzibugan, 2006; Abuza, 2005).

The amir, or leader, of the group controls weapons stockpiles, though ownership, possession, maintenance, and ammunition supply is the responsibility of each individual fighter. The latter are usually already well-armed when recruited into the ASG, particularly in Sulu.[13] Waste of ammunition is prohibited, except for practice and cleaning purposes. A regular supply of ammunition—at least a dozen, preferably long, magazines per fighter—is to be maintained, with half a dozen to be kept for use if needed during the retreat phase of an operation.[14] Ammunition supply is apparently sufficient to allow for concentrated firing during fighting.

## Sources

Most ASG firearms are purchased from gun smugglers. The original source of the weapons is often the government arsenal, which has been gradually pilfered thanks to corruption and inadequate supervision of inventories, particularly during military coup attempts. In so-called retrieval operations, the ASG retrieves firearms caches shortly after they are left on roadsides by prearrangement with soldiers who bring them on military trucks (Torres, 2001, pp. 39–40). Some weapons—including those used by the main ASG group led by Khadaffy Janjalani—were bought in Malaysia, while the recoilless rifles and other big guns are old pieces bought from military camps in Zamboanga (Torres, 2001). Ammunition is obtained easily from dealers and from cash-strapped soldiers and policemen. It is secured by ASG irregulars or sympathizers who are assigned to multi-purpose missions in urban areas. These irregulars also shop for spare rifle parts.[15]

Corrupt politicians, warlords, and kidnap-for-ransom syndicates are also sources of small arms. Politician-warlords are known to store some of their illegal firearms with the ASG or other rebels. Funds generated by the ASG from illicit activities, such as kidnapping, have been invested in gun-running and smuggling ventures, including of sophisticated weaponry. Equipment, such as night-vision scopes and visors, global positioning system gadgets, satellite links, fibre optics, and digital network communications, are either donated by business partners in Sabah, Singapore, or Thailand, or taken from

US-supplied Philippine troops in the field.[16] A more limited supply of ASG weapons comes as payment for personal debt, blood money, or marital dowry.

### Recovered

The AFP claimed that during 1997–2002 it gained 890 firearms from the ASG and lost 71 firearms to the group (National Security Council Secretariat, 2002). The first figure is unlikely given it is almost three times the AFP estimate for ASG average firearms strength. Moreover, an AFP source states the firearms of fallen ASG fighters are recovered by their own comrades armed with machetes during tactical engagements (Philippine Marine Corps, 2002). The second figure suggests that—unlike the NPA—the ASG does not put a premium on gathering firearms from fallen adversaries in battle, presumably because it does not need them. An ASG source says that some small arms taken are resold—though the ammunition is retained—and the proceeds are used for food and maintenance supplies.[17]

## Human security issues

### Human rights abuses

The ASG has become notorious for gross human rights abuses, including well-documented bombings, group kidnappings, beheadings, and deliberately targeting civilians in order to spread extreme fear. In one particular instance in 1995, the ASG ransacked the provincial town of Ipil in the Zamboanga peninsula, killing many civilians.[18] Since then, the ASG's impact on human insecurity in the country has been disproportionate to its small size, armed strength, and geographic location.

### Children associated with fighting forces

The ASG's use of child soldiers, mainly aged 13–16, has been confirmed by military reports of encounters with the group. The ASG uses Islam to draw in mostly high-school students, who are promised training, a salary, firearms, and even scholarships abroad (Makinano, 2002, p. 38). Recruitment is voluntary. In Basilan, about 15–30 per cent of children and minors in the communities influenced by the ASG have become active members (Cagoco-Guiam, 2002, p. 3). Teachers and students who were held hostage by the ASG in Basilan in 2000 met a 12-year-old ASG fighter carrying a 'baby Armalite' (Torres, 2001, p. 51). In 2006, the military in Sulu reported that the ASG was using 16–20-year-old recruit–trainees for extortion, harassment, and liquidation missions, including against soldiers (Alipala, 2006a).

### Gender

There are no women among the known leaders or fighters of the ASG, reflective of the patriarchal nature of Moro—and, in particular, Tausug—society. Women form part of the social organization that constitutes the social base of the ASG. Some ASG leaders were guilty of a form of sexual slavery when they took women hostages as their mountain 'wives' in the major hostage-taking incidents of 2000 and 2001 (Burnham and Merrill, 2003; Torres, 2001).

### Displacement

Internal displacement is the usual consequence of AFP operations against the ASG in the field, rather than the direct result of ASG operations. At the height of the February 2005 hostilities involving the AFP, the ASG, and the MNLF in Sulu, the number of displaced civilians was reportedly 15 per cent of the total Sulu population of 536,000, or more than 80,000 (Mindanao Peaceweavers, 2005, p. 14). In May 2006, it was reported that more than 4,000 people failed to return to their homes in four villages in Patikul town five years after military offensives against the ASG in late 2000 had displaced more than 117,000 people in seven towns of Sulu (Alipala, 2006b).

## Outlook

### Capacity for negotiations

Ideologically, the ASG is not well-disposed to peace negotiations. It represents an Islamic movement with a radical or non-conformist tendency which rejects negotiation in favour of jihad (Wadi, 2006, p. 96). Historically, it emerged out of young Moro rebel disenchantment with the MNLF's peace negotiations, and currently seeks to scupper the MILF's peace negotiations (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2005). The ASG has used hostage and ransom negotiations to air some political demands (Aventajado, 2003; Burnham and Merrill, 2003).

## Prospects for the future

The deaths in battle of ASG amir Khadaffy Janjalani and his top lieutenant Abu Solaiman were, without doubt, big blows to the ASG, but they are unlikely to finish off the group, which has faced numerous setbacks in its history. Indeed, the resurgence of ASG-related kidnappings and the apparent emergence of 'new faces' leading them in 2008 could herald yet another comeback.

The strategic prospects of the ASG do not depend so much on the outcome of yet another major campaign of temporary military saturation with palliative or cosmetic civic action as on the outcome of a comprehensive Mindanao peace process with the MILF. A solution that effectively addresses the situation that gave rise to the ASG and other rebel groups in the first place could pave the way for a softer, more conciliatory approach towards the ASG, especially in Sulu. But this also depends on the direction taken by the ASG, which, in turn, depends on the orientation of any emerging new leaders—or, more precisely, on which of them gain ascendancy. ■

## Endnotes

1 See Wadi (2003) and Vitug and Gloria (2000). This account was confirmed by Khadaffy A. Janjalani in an interview by SSN field researcher Octavio A. Dinampo on 27 February 2006 somewhere in the hinterland of Basilan (hereinafter 'Janjalani interview').

2 Information provided by Professor Octavio A. Dinampo, co-author of Chapter 6 of this volume, to Soliman M. Santos, Jr. on 8 March 2007.

3 Information provided by Dinampo, 25 February 2009.

4 According to Taylor and Idjirani (2006, p. 36), ideological motivation is particularly important among recruits in Basilan.

5 Janjalani interview. See also Abuza (2002, pp. 439–41) and Ressa (2003, p. 107).

6 Currency conversion rate as of 31 December 2007.

7 Radullan Sahiron, top ASG commander in Sulu, interview by SSN field researcher Octavio A. Dinampo on 18 March 2006 in Indanan, Sulu (hereinafter 'Sahiron interview').

8 Eduardo F. Ugarte, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Terrorism Studies, University of Canberra, conversation with SSN researcher Soliman M. Santos, Jr. on 2 November 2006 in Quezon City.

9 Focused group discussions (FGDs) with residents of Barangay Danag, Patikul, Sulu by SSN field researcher Octavio A. Dinampo on 25 March 2006.

10 National Security Council Secretariat (2002) with AFP Intelligence and Southern Command as sources.

11 See the country reports on the Philippine Campaign to Ban Landmines in the annual *Landmine Monitor Report* since 1999, published by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

12 Sahiron Interview; Philippine Marine Corps (2002, pp. 34, 47–49); and Torres (2001, p. 35).

13 Sahiron interview.

14 Sahiron interview.

15 Sahiron interview.

16 Sahiron interview.

17 Sahiron interview.

18 This is well documented. See for example the background documents on ASG of the International Institute for Counter-terrorism at <http://212.150.54.123/organizations/org_frame.cfm?orgid=3>; or Vitug and Gloria (2000).

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# CHAPTER 21

# Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM)

## Overview

The Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM) is a recently emerged local jihadi group of militant Islamic converts from the main island region of Luzon in the Christian part of the northern Philippines. The group takes its name from the Muslim overlord who ruled Manila before the Spanish colonizers captured it in battle. Other names associated with the group are 'Rajah Solaiman Revolutionary Movement', 'Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement', and 'jemaah islamiya' (Islamic group or community). The RSM aims for the Islamization of the whole country through *da'wah* (propagation) and *jihad* (struggle). The latter has included involvement in acts of terrorism, usually in collaboration with the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). In 2006, the RSM was described by an authoritative government source as 'the most dangerous group facing the Philippines', but its strength has since waned (Associated Press, 2006). It currently has limited resources and capabilities and, when viewed in isolation, does not present a serious risk to Philippine national security (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007).

## Basic characteristics

### Typology

The RSM is an anti-government group. Unlike the two Moro liberation insurgencies and the ASG, it has national ambitions in terms of Islamization, even though it is the smallest and weakest of these groups.

### Current status

The RSM is still considered active, though it has been considerably decimated and scattered by arrests and military–police actions. A 2005 International Crisis

Group (ICG) report said the group had 'continued to attract new blood' and described the surviving members of the original cohort as 'at large and potentially dangerous' (ICG, 2005, p. 8). A source familiar with the group described it in 2006 as undergoing a period of consolidation and 'conditioning' (ideological strengthening).[1] By 2008, however, the group was struggling to survive as its imprisoned founder shifted his attention to more personal concerns.[2] Nevertheless, in June 2008 the US State Department designated this defunct group, its imprisoned leader, and several members as 'global terrorists', taking its cue from the UN Security Council, which had listed the RSM and eight of its members among entities affiliated with al-Qaeda, the Taliban, or Osama bin Laden (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2008a).

## Origins

The RSM was founded by Ahmad Santos in 2001.[3] It emerged from the work of the Fi Sabilillah Da'wah and Media Foundation (FSDMFI, FIDAMFI, or FiSab), which Santos had set up in 1995[4] as a vehicle for Islamic proselytizing among mainstream Filipino Christians after he himself had converted to Islam in 1993. Its purpose was, in part, to divert ongoing military operations against the ASG in Basilan. Santos eventually developed a jihadist orientation, due in part to the influence of his reported contacts with the ASG and the late chairman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Salamat Hashim. He began to use FSDMFI as a base for recruitment, indoctrination, training, fundraising, logistical support, and other activities for jihad in discreet collaboration with like-minded groups. For all intents and purposes, FSDMFI the institute and RSM the movement became one and the same.[5] The government had difficulty distinguishing between the two entities and the broader Balik-Islam ('Return to Islam') movement of Christian converts to Islam, a mistake one Philippine counter-terrorism analyst described as tantamount to 'associating Islam with terrorism' (Banlaoi, 2006b).

Santos's initial concern was to 'cleanse' certain undesirable practices in the Muslim community in Luzon, such as the 'wrong' propagation of Islam. He and his followers initially sent threatening letters asking people to change their ways. Emboldened by their early successes, they began to procure arms and conduct military-type training in Santos's provincial farms in order to build up to jihad. In May 2002, in a premature armed encounter with members of the group, the police uncovered the group and two of its training camps and carried out the first arrests of its members. This thrust the group into the public eye as 'RSM'. Labeled RSM, it decided it might as well play the role of RSM.[6]

## Aims

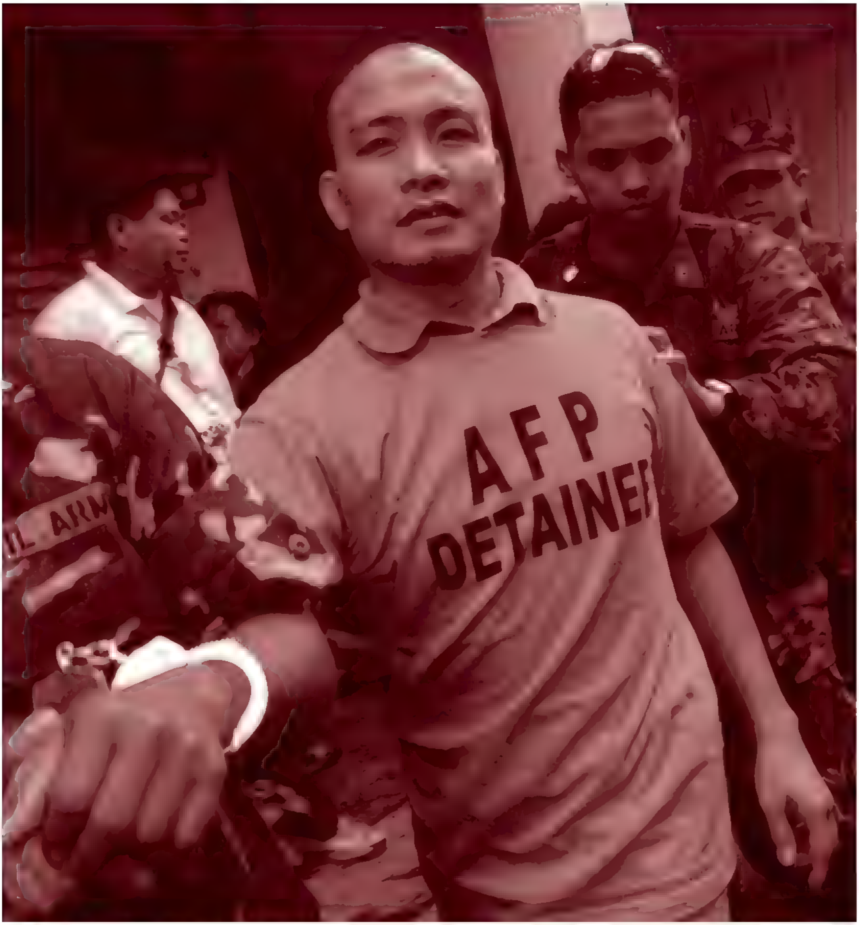
The RSM's overall long-term aim is to Islamize the whole of the Philippines, not just the traditional Moro homeland in the southern Philippines. Santos says it also supports the jihad in Mindanao towards an Islamic state (a state under Islamic law) and the global jihad.[7] An observer of the group has described its aims as: to 'liberate' all cities and towns in the Philippines by converting non-Muslims to Islam; to play a diversionary role in the Northern and Central Luzon region (or the whole of Luzon and the Visayas) vis-à-vis the main Muslim conflict in Mindanao; and to help create an independent Muslim nation in the southern Philippines.[8]

## Ideology

Like that of the ASG, the RSM's ideology may be described as Islamic jihadism, or a radical Islamic revivalist tendency which is non-conformist, goes beyond nation states and nationalism, and considers *jihad fi sabilillah* (struggle in the cause of Allah) or *jihad qitaal* (political struggle-cum-war against the enemy) as necessary (Wadi, 2006, p. 96). Unlike the ASG, the RSM makes less reference to the Moro cause, in favour of an emphasis on jihad. The latter is seen as integral to Islam, and both *jihad al akbar* (the 'greater *jihad*' of self-reformation) and *jihad al saghir* (the 'lesser *jihad*' of a just defensive war against enemies of Islam) are seen as mutually reinforcing.[9] The lesser jihad is particularly important in Mindanao.[10]

## Leadership

The acknowledged *amir* (leader) of the RSM is Muslim convert Ahmad Santos (formerly Hilarion del Rosario Santos III), who has been in prison since October 2005 (ICG, 2005, p. 6). The group's spiritual adviser (*mufti*), teacher, and ideologue is another Muslim convert, Sheikh Omar (Reuben) Lavilla.



RSM Amir Ahmad Santos is escorted by Philippine soldiers after attending court in Manila, 10 November 2005. © Joel Nito/AFP

Schooled in higher Islamic studies, conversant in Qur'anic Arabic, and an expert in both the Qur'an and the *hadith* (the tradition of the prophet Muhammad), Lavilla moulded the group ideologically.[11] He was believed to be leading what remains of the group until he was turned over to Philippine authorities in August 2008 after being arrested in Bahrain in July 2008 (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2008b). A January 2005 police intelligence memorandum refers to two other leaders of the RSM: Ahmad Javier, described as 'presently the *Amir* of the RSM' and 'the second-in-command of the RSM'; and Abdul Muhaymin (Virgilio Carino), described as 'the *Amir Sab* (commander of the Special Operations

Group) of the RSM' (Mendoza, 2005). Their leadership roles, if they exist, are not as established as those of Santos and Lavilla, and some sources say Carino left to form his own group. There have been no reported factions within the RSM.[12]

## Support

### Political base

The political base of the RSM is the broader Balik-Islam community of Muslim converts found in the northern Philippines, in particular in the main island region of Luzon, and also among overseas Filipinos in the Middle East. There are an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 converts (or 'reverts', as they prefer to be called) from an estimated 6.6 million Muslims in the Philippines. They are the seventh-largest group among the 14 Muslim groups and account for the fact that Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the country (Banlaoi, 2006a). Balik-Islamists tend to be treated as second-class citizens by the main Moro tribes because of their convert status, which in turn tends to make them more devout and drawn to Islamic revivalism.[13] Those who were converted in Saudi Arabia were exposed to the official state of Islam, which is *Wahhabi/Salafi* or purist Islam. RSM leader Santos had a notion of considering Muslim converts as a distinct tribe among the established Moro tribes, though this was later rejected by some Muslim converts on the grounds that Balik-Islam is not based on ethnicity but on the Islamic *ummah* (global community of believers).[14]

### Combatants and constituency

The RSM draws its combatants and constituency from the radical fringe of the Balik-Islam movement, with overseas Filipino workers returning from the Middle East tending to be 'the most important source of adherents for the more ideological forms of activist *Balik-Islam*' (ICG, 2005, p. 1). One police intelligence source identified alleged links between Balik-Islam cells in Pangasinan and Tarlac provinces in the north-central part of Luzon and a number of NGOs and foundations, including Al Maarif Educational Center Inc., Dar'ul Hijra Foundation Inc., FSDMFI, Islamic Information Center, Islamic Students Call and Guidance, and Islamic Learning Center of Pangasinan (Mendoza, 2003, pp. 122–38). Care is cautioned against tarring the organizations and their members wholesale as RSM, however.

### Sources of financing and other support

Private Saudi patrons, some with al-Qaeda links, and the pool of some 900,000 Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia provided initial sources of financing.[15] Intelligence sources say the RSM received about USD 200,000 from ASG leader Khadaffy Janjalani for the RSM's initial operational activities in Manila and USD 5,000 from JI senior operative and Bali bomber Umar Patek to be used in the foiled Ermita district bombing plot (Banlaoi, 2006b). The RSM's main conduit for funding was closed off when FSDMFI was shut down.

## Military activities

### Size and strength

At its height, intelligence sources estimated the RSM's membership to be 50–100, with a core group of not more than 30. Though small, the RSM drew strength from its collaboration with local and foreign jihadi groups such as the ASG, JI, and al-Qaeda (Banlaoi, 2006b). The AFP estimate of RSM personnel in 2006 is 'around 28' (Esperon, 2006, p. 6).

### Command and control

No distinction is made between military and political leadership. Given the group's small size, its military organization is simple. A police intelligence source has spoken of 'Balik-Islam cells in Pangasinan and Tarlac' comprising a small number of operatives (Mendoza, 2003, p. 111). The same source has referred to *Hukbong* Khalid Trinidad (HKT or Khalid Trinidad Army, named after the first RSM martyr) as the ostensible armed wing of the RSM, and says 'the HKT-Luzon Chapter is composed of five independent cells. Each cell is composed of five cell members' (Mendoza, 2005). A source familiar with the RSM states, however, that HKT was made up by the military to magnify the RSM threat.[16] The RSM used to provide its recruits with some military training, including on explosives and guerrilla warfare, until police raided its two provincial training camps in May 2002. The MILF reportedly provided training to at least 50 RSM members in December 2001 (Mendoza, 2003, pp. 116–17). It was a conflict of command that led to the RSM's premature armed encounter with the police (see 'Origins', above).[17]

## Areas of operation

The RSM operates mainly in Luzon and had two known training camps in the rural provinces of Pangasinan and Tarlac, north of Manila. Its de facto headquarters was at the FSDMFI office in metropolitan Manila, until it was shut down.

## Strategy and tactics

The RSM strategy is to undertake both da'wah and jihad, simultaneously. The armed struggle is waged against the enemy—the Philippine government, particularly Arroyo's administration, which is seen as supporting the United States, the main enemy of the global jihad. The main tactic is to bomb targets that hurt the government economically (therefore dampening its economic capacity to sustain its perceived war against Muslims) and strike fear in the enemy. Civilian casualties are seen as 'incidental' to the real objective of economic sabotage and a 'sacrifice' necessary to achieve justice for the honour of Islam.[18] Reportedly described as 'urban *mujahideens*' by Lavilla, most of the armed incidents involving the RSM have taken place in urban areas, especially metro Manila (Banlaoi, 2006b). Its activities have almost exclusively involved improvised explosive devices (IEDs) rather than attack-by-fire operations (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007, p. 67).

The strategic value of the RSM to the Philippine jihad is the geographical reach of its main constituency, the Balik-Islam movement, which is based in the northern Philippines, specifically Luzon and the metro Manila capital region, and includes overseas Filipino workers in the Middle East. This opens up new fronts for jihad and da'wah beyond the traditional Muslim Mindanao front. One counter-terrorism analyst says that this:

> *indicated that at the very least, there was a large disaffected population, so cut off from mainstream Philippine life that they actually would convert from Christianity to Islam, and at worst, that the southern Muslim rebels wanted to expand the*

> *battlefield physically to relieve some of the pressure the government was putting on them.* (Abuza, 2005, pp. 35–36)

The RSM appears to have been grand on plans but short on capabilities. Several bombing incidents linked to the group, including the Superferry bombing of 2004 and the Valentine's Day bombings of 2005, were really ASG operations with RSM elements or former elements playing a supporting role under ASG command.[19] According to police intelligence sources, the RSM did have large-scale bombing plans of its own, including a plan to bomb several locations in metro Manila in 2005, most notably a mammoth Catholic procession held every January (Papa, 2007).[20] Other reported plans include the truck bombing of President Arroyo, a rocket-propelled grenade attack on the US embassy, a grenade and bomb attack on a petroleum depot in the outskirts of metro Manila, other corporate building bombing attacks, kidnap-for-ransom operations, and assassinations of prominent government and police officials. The group was said to have developed a small pool of potential suicide bombers to carry out some of these plans (Mendoza, 2005). A source familiar with the RSM confirmed the plans but said they were never activated.[21]

Santos confessed under police interrogation that he and Lavilla had trained potential suicide bombers up to the point of their taking the *shaheed* (martyrdom pledge) (Banlaoi, 2006b). Others say suicide bombing is unlikely in the Philippines given the absence of that kind of tradition and the availability of other military and political options to potential bombers, at least among the Islamic converts. One source with close knowledge of the RSM suggested the spectre of 'suicide terrorism' had been magnified to justify stepping up counter-terrorism measures.[22]

## Collaboration with other armed groups

The RSM's main collaboration has been with the ASG, to which it has connections through marriage: Santos's second wife is a sister of the wives of the late ASG leaders Khadaffy Janjalani and Jainal Antel Sali, Jr. (Abu Solaiman). Lavilla and Khadaffy were said to be classmates at the Darul Imam Shafi'ie religious academy in Marawi City and later at the MILF's military training camp Busrah in Butig, Lanao del Sur, where they may have received bomb-making training from an al-Qaeda operative (ICG, 2005, p. 7). According to police intelligence, the al-Qaeda 11 September pilots attended the RSM training camp in the Santos family property in Pampanga, the same province where they later learned to fly (Banlaoi, 2006b).

According to the ICG, both the Superferry bombing of 2004 and the Valentine Day's bombings of 2005 'were apparently executed at the primary direction of the ASG leaders Khadaffy Janjalani and Abu Solaiman by Balik-Islam converts connected to Ahmad Santos's Rajah Solaiman Movement and trained by JI operatives under MILF protection' (ICG, 2005, pp. 16–18). MILF protection refers to a defence cordon to secure the RSM's Medina training camp, which is near the JI's Jabal Quba training camp in Mount Kararao, Central Mindanao (ICG, 2005).

A source close to the RSM says that, notwithstanding Santos's marital ties to the ASG, it was Lavilla who was in closer contact with the ASG, while Santos focused on links to the MILF, particularly when Hashim was MILF chairman. An RSM source says that RSM–MILF links weakened after Hashim's death in 2003.[23] The MILF denies links with the RSM, ASG, and JI. Any links are likely to involve rogue MILF units or field commanders who take a harder ideological line than the group's mainstream and are sceptical of its involvement in peace negotiations.

There have been allegations of contact between RSM members and Philippine leftist groups—particularly with veterans of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)—but there appear to be no RSM–leftist group alliances at the institutional or organizational level. The CPP has dismissed a police claim that the New People's Army (NPA) has joined forces with the RSM, decrying it as 'a mere fiction created by the Armed Forces of the Philippines as a bogeyman to put the blame on supposed Muslim converts for the bombings which are in fact carried out by the military itself' (CPP, 2006).[24]

## Small arms and light weapons

### Stockpiles

What is known of the RSM's stockpiles is largely the result of police raids and operations. Raids on the RSM provincial training camps in May 2002 yielded the following: one .22 magnum; one Smith & Wesson .38 revolver; one Colt .45 pistol; one 9 mm pistol made in Brazil; one air rifle; one 12-gauge shotgun; two M14 rifles; two M16 rifles; 11 fragmentation hand grenades; 11 rifle grenades; 568 live ammunition for calibre 5.56; 145 live ammunition for calibre 7.72; 40 live ammunition for calibre .45; four live ammunition for shotgun; eight magazines for M14; seven magazines for M16; detonating cord; two plastic bags of ammonium nitrate; and three Claymore anti-personnel mines (Mendoza, 2003, pp. 113–15). A police raid on an RSM safe house in metro Manila in March 2005 recovered 600 kilos of explosives and related bomb-making materials, which were supposedly to be used in retaliatory bomb attacks during Easter (Pazzibugan, 2005). Other police raids and arrests against the RSM have yielded similar weapons and explosives but in much smaller quantities.

It is unlikely that the RSM needed large numbers of small arms and light weapons given its diminutive size and the fact that it was engaged primarily in bombings. It experimented with a number of IED designs, including concealed devices, such as the bomb inside a television set used to attack the Superferry 14. Several bombs comprising C4 plastic explosives melted down with kerosene and injected into personal healthcare containers were recovered from a RSM safe house (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007, pp. 67–68).

## Sources

The main source of weapons for the RSM is purchases from illegal gun dealers and arms sellers. It was an early rash attempt by an RSM operative to buy M14s and M16s in bulk that led to the first crackdown on the RSM when an arms seller with military connections reported the matter to the authorities.[25] Other sources are from donations by allied groups, such as the ASG (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007, p. 68).

## Recovered

Police have recovered small arms, pistols, shotguns, and a few automatic weapons during raids on RSM training camps and safe houses (see 'Stockpiles', above).

## Human security issues

### Human rights abuses

The terrorist bombings the group has been involved in have led to civilian casualties.

### Children Associated with Fighting Forces (CAFF)

There are no known or reported cases of CAFF in the RSM.

### Gender

There are no women among the known leaders or combatants of the RSM, reflecting the patriarchal nature of purist Islam. Conjugal relations have been important in linking RSM and ASG leaders. There are no reports of abuse of women.

### Displacement

This issue is not applicable, since the main targets of bombings have been transport vehicles or public places in urban centres, not residential areas.

## Outlook

### Capacity for negotiations

The RSM is ideologically opposed to peace negotiations. A source familiar with the RSM suggests that the group might be open to peace negotiations that are tactical and are based on the balance of forces.[26] This balance is very unfavourable to the RSM at present.

### Prospects for the future

The RSM's prospects are unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future given that the group has been decimated and scattered by arrests and military–police actions as, more recently, has the ASG, on whom the group had relied for guidance and support. These developments are unlikely to end radical and jihadist influences on the Balik-Islam social base of the RSM and do not preclude the emergence of a new armed group along similar lines to the RSM. The negative experience of the RSM might push the younger generation of radical and jihadist Muslim converts to seek alternative courses of action. ◼

## Endnotes

1 Interviews with Abu Saifullah, pseudonym of a former official of the Fi Sabilillah Da'wah and Media Foundation, Inc. (FSDMFI) and close confidant of RSM founder Ahmad Santos, by Soliman M. Santos, Jr. on 18 May 2006, 7 June 2006, and 19 August 2008 in Quezon City (hereinafter 'Saifullah interviews').

2 Saifullah interviews.

3 Saifullah interviews.

4 Saifullah interviews.

5 Saifullah interviews.

6 Saifullah interviews and interview with an imprisoned leader of the RSM by Soliman M. Santos, Jr. in 2006 (hereinafter 'Prison interview').

7 Prison interview.

8 Mohammed Yakub Razzaque, 'Alleged Number Two Leader of Rajah Sulayman Movement Still Evasive & Remains the Last Irritant in the Almost Obsolete Muslim Terrorist Group', handwritten manuscript faxed to the Japanese daily newspaper *Nikkei/ Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 31 March 2006. Razzaque was the founding editor of the now defunct monthly publication *Central Luzon Muslim Mirror*.

9 Prison interview.

10 Saifullah interviews and prison interview.

11 Saifullah interviews.

12 Personal communication by Saifullah to Soliman M. Santos, Jr. on 19 May 2007.

13 Saifullah interviews.

14 Saifullah interviews.

15 Saifullah interviews; ICG (2005, p. 1).

16 Saifullah interviews.

17 Saifullah interviews.

18 Prison interview.

19 Prison interview.

20 Citing Chief Supt. Romeo Ricardo, director of the Philippine National Police (PNP) Intelligence Group (IG).

21 Saifullah interviews.

22 Saifullah interviews.

23 Prison interview.

24 When interviewed, Saifullah said there have been meetings between RSM and Balik-Islam leaders and the leaders of leftist groups, and spoke of an affinity between certain leftist concepts and Islamic teachings. He added that the funding and resources available to Balik-Islam were of interest to leftist groups.

25 Saifullah interviews.

26 Saifullah interviews.

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## CHAPTER 22

# Pentagon Gang and Other Obscure Moro Armed Groups

The main aim of this section is to establish that the Pentagon Gang (PG) is neither a rebel nor a terrorist group. It is a Moro criminal kidnap-for-ransom gang and therefore not the kind of non-state armed group (i.e. insurgent, rebel, jihadi, or terrorist groups) that is central to this study. The PG has been *mistakenly* included in the US list of terrorist organizations, however, and this mischaracterization, coupled with the rebel backgrounds of the group's leaders and the areas of operation it shares with rebel groups, justifies its inclusion here.

## Pentagon Gang: overview

The PG is a Moro criminal kidnap-for ransom gang whose most prominent leaders are former members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). It shares common areas of operation in Central Mindanao with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), including its base area around the Liguasan Marsh. It is thought to be Mindanao's largest kidnap-for-ransom group (Davis, 2004).

## Basic characteristics

### Typology

The PG is a Moro criminal gang with antecedents among rebel groups and with subnational ambitions and operations. It has no known ideological agenda.

### Current status

The PG is still active, but decimated and contained.

## Origins

The PG is said to have been founded in the late 1980s—about the same time as the ASG founders became disenchanted with the Misuari leadership of the MNLF (though for more ideological reasons). It was created by Faisal Marohombsar, an MNLF commander turned rebel-returnee, and some of his former MNLF comrades. These rebel origins separate it from other criminal kidnap-for-ransom gangs (Rimban, 2003). Marohombsar left the MNLF by surrendering to the government in the early 1980s under its rebel-returnee programme. He claimed he later turned to banditry because government officials in charge of that programme reneged on promised livelihood projects for him and his followers, and he was forced underground because government agents were killing his supporters. Kidnapping brought easy money, so he forged an alliance with remnants of the kidnapping gang run by former MNLF Commander Mubarak (adopting the name Commander Mubarak II). It was this group that came to be known as the Pentagon Gang (Mendoza, 2002, p. 41). It has given no explanation for its name.

## Aims and ideology

The PG has no political aims or ideology other than financial gain. The rebel backgrounds of its leaders have been invoked on occasion by the group to lend it the veneer of social purpose. MILF spokesman Eid Kabalu recalled that '[o]penly, Faisal Marohombsar has been saying that he has a lot of gripes against the military, promises that were never kept, and he was doing this [kidnapping] to call attention to those gripes' (Rimban, 2003). These included the non-release of livelihood funds promised to his group during its surrender (Mendoza, 2002, p. 41).

## Leadership

The most prominent leaders have been Faisal Marohombsar and Tahir Alonto (Commander Tigre), also a former MNLF commander. Marohombsar and Alonto are prominent family names within the Maranao ethnic group of the Lanao provinces. Faisal is related to Emily Marohombsar, former president of

Mindanao State University (MSU) in Marawi City in Lanao del Sur and member of the government panel for peace talks with the MILF. Faisal Marohombsar was employed as the MSU's chief security officer after surrendering in the early 1980s, but his time there coincided with a spate of kidnappings in the Marawi-Lanao area. He was killed in a high-profile combined police and military operation in Cavite province just outside metro Manila in August 2002 (Mendoza, 2002, p. 41).

Although the Alonto name is associated with Lanao, Tahir's base was said to be Pagalungan town in Maguindanao province, which is associated with the Maguindanao ethnic group. Pagalungan is the home-town of late MILF Chair, Salamat Hashim, and one of the main entry points to Liguasan Marsh (Mendoza, 2002, p. 41). Tahir Alonto had a bounty on his head of PHP 5 million (USD 89,200)[1] and was reported killed along with 16 other members of the PG in a Philippine military air strike at a hideout in Liguasan Marsh in August 2004 (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2004). MILF intelligence allegedly contributed to the operation. Alonto's reported death is unconfirmed, however. In December 2005, a captured PG member claimed that Alonto was alive and in command of the gang, which he had since split into several factions to make the military manhunt for him more difficult. In April 2006, one of Alonto's aides was killed while allegedly trying to escape police custody (*Sun Star*, 2006).

## Support

### Political base, combatants, and constituency

The PG's political base and combatants are largely confined to the close personal, clan, and social networks of its leaders. Beyond this, it has a constituency among disaffected Moro youths. In the weeks after Marohombsar's death, the PG reportedly stepped up recruitment among young Muslim men living around Liguasan Marsh. Abogado 'Gado' Bago (Commander Mubarak) 'pioneered' kidnapping in Central Mindanao in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and several of the region's kidnapping leaders are related to him, including Musa Ali, also an ex-MNLF commander turned rebel-returnee, and Mayangkang Saguile (Rimban, 2003).

### Sources of financing and support

The PG's main source of financing is the ransoms generated from kidnappings. More than 30 cases were reported between 2001 and 2004, involving the abduction of both locals—especially Filipino-Chinese—and foreigners (Davis, 2004). These include the 2001 kidnapping of five Chinese engineers employed by the Japanese-funded Malmar irrigation project in Carmen, North Cotabato (Kaufman, 2004). A month after Marohombsar's death, the PG was thought to have been responsible for kidnapping a Filipino-American teenager in Cagayan de Oro City in Northern Mindanao. The teenager was released after his family paid a PHP 1.25 million (USD 24,200) ransom.[2] Over a period of a dozen years beginning in 1990, the PG and other kidnap-for-ransom gangs in the Central Mindanao area reaped hundreds of millions of Philippine pesos in ransom money (Rimban, 2003).

## Military activities

### Size and strength

Philippine Army intelligence sources estimate that there were 200 PG members in 2003 (BBC, 2007). The PG is smaller than the ASG of Western Mindanao, the other Moro armed group most associated with kidnapping.

### Command and control

The PG is a criminal gang, not a military organization. Police and military authorities have described it as comprising as many as five bandit groups led by former MNLF rebels said to command hundreds of followers. At the helm of these groups are ringleaders including Commander Mubarak, Mubarak II, Tigre, Tropical, Aguila, and Commander Wonderful. Supposed PG sub- or splinter groups bear names such as Abu Sofia (discussed below), Suicide Bombers, Diamond, and Dragon (Rimban, 2003).

According to one police intelligence source, the PG is 'composed of one direction and control group with seven functional groupings' for abduction, negotiation, strike, security, safe keeping, surveillance/casing, and support. It 'also has eight component units' which are actually subgroups of the PG, each headed by a subleader, such as Tahir Alonto and Mayangkang Saguile (Mendoza, 2002, pp. 42–43).

## Areas of operation

The PG's main area of operation is around its base in the Liguasan Marsh sanctuary, accessible by both land and water from the provinces of Maguindanao, North Cotabato, and Sultan Kudarat in Central Mindanao (all also MILF areas of operation). Some PG kidnappings and attacks, such as the aforementioned kidnapping in Cagayan de Oro City in Northern Mindanao, have occurred outside of those areas. It has also staged a couple of unsuccessful attacks against the Dole Philippines pineapple plantation in South Cotabato province and has reportedly conducted kidnapping operations and bombings in Manila. This includes the kidnapping and murder of a Greek national in 2001 and the holding hostage of a four-year-old child from an influential family for a ransom of PHP 100 million (USD 1.88 million)[3] (Rimban, 2003).

## Strategy and tactics

Kidnapping for ransom is the PG's basic strategy and tactic, and the group is blamed for the successive waves of kidnappings that hit the southern Philippines from 1990. It was also believed responsible for bombings, mostly in Central Mindanao. Investigative journalist Luz Rimban says, 'Most of all, the gang has managed to put Mindanao in a state of recurring terror, for whatever purposes this may serve' (Rimban, 2003).

The terror that kidnapping generates seems to be incidental to the main purpose of financial gain. Even the bombings appeared to have been for extortive rather than terrorist purposes: the Cotabato City-based Weena Bus Company was bombed because the owners refused to give protection money. Aside from transport companies, multinational agribusinesses, such as Dole, and foreign religious groups and missionaries, such as the Trappist monks in South Cotabato, have also been targets of extortion and kidnapping (Rimban, 2003). The economic damage to investment and tourism is likely to be an unintended consequence of the PG's actions

Given its Liguasan Marsh base, the PG is likely to have riverine skills similar to those of the MILF, though it uses them for transport rather than for warfare. In terms of its mode of operation, each abduction is commissioned independently, often by a senior member of the community in league with the group (landowner, local government official, or member of the security forces), and normally close to the Liguasan Marsh sanctuary. Once a target is identified, a team is mobilized, either from among a pre-existing group within the PG or from new recruits. The team is not normally told for whom they are working. Kidnap teams tend to operate quickly with relatively little time spent on surveillance. Targets are normally seized from vehicles and then taken to a safe house within the Liguasan Marsh area, where the authorities are provided with details of the ransom required and payment terms. The originator of the operation often becomes involved only at the payment stage (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007).

## Collaboration with other armed groups

Although the most prominent PG leaders are former MILF rebels, there appear to be no dealings between the two groups. The PG has been described as operating 'under [the] shadow' of the MILF and has often been mistaken for it because of their shared areas of operation (Rimban, 2003). Police superintendent Rodolfo Mendoza described the PG as 'definitely a creation of the MILF' organized to generate funds for it through illegal means and 'to insulate the MILF from accusations that its members are involved in purely criminal acts' (Mendoza, 2002). Samir Hashim, the younger brother of the late MILF chairman, 'is allegedly the brains of the Pentagon' (Mendoza, 2002, pp. 43–44). The same police source identifies another supposed key tie between the groups as Tahir Alonto, a nephew of the MILF's long-standing military chief (and now Chairman) Al Haj Murad Ebrahim.

MILF spokesman Eid Kabalu denies any such links and argues that the PG and other kidnapping groups are actually part of the dirty tactics and fund-raising activities of the military and police, and provide a convenient way of destroying the MILF's credibility (Rimban, 2003). The armed forces allegedly used the pursuit of the PG in Liguasan Marsh as the pretext for the 'Buliok offensive' against the new MILF headquarters there in February 2003.

Any links that might have existed on an organizational level have been cut by the MILF since it signed a Joint Communiqué on Criminal Interdiction with the government in May 2002 and provided intelligence that contributed to the AFP air strike against the PG hideout in Liguasan Marsh in August 2004.[4] Personal and kinship ties may still exist between members of the two groups, however, especially where there are weaknesses in the MILF chain of command.

## Small arms and light weapons

The PG is equipped with small arms and light weapons, mostly handguns (.38 and .45), 5.56 mm AR15-pattern assault rifles, 7.62 mm M14 rifles, M1 Garand rifles, and shotguns (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007). A police intelligence source in 2002 estimated the PG to have more than 400 firearms (Mendoza, 2003, p. 44). This is twice the estimated number of members. Two gang members surrendered to the police in 2002, turning in several weapons, mostly automatic rifles (*Daily Times*, 2002). An M16 armalite rifle, a Garand rifle, an M14 rifle, a .38 revolver, and several hand grenades were seized in a military raid on a PG hideout in a remote village of a town in Maguindanao in September 2003 (Sarmiento, 2003).

South Central Mindanao, where PG operations have been focused, has been awash with small arms since the 1970s, and newer weaponry and ammunition is available on the black market (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007).

## Human security issues

### Human rights

Kidnapping is the group's modus operandi. A few victims have died at their hands, even after a ransom was paid. Others have been killed in the crossfire during police–military rescue operations (Rimban, 2003). Kidnap victims have included women and children (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2002).

### Children associated with fighting forces

Young Muslim men living around Liguasan Marsh who have been recruited by the PG are likely to include some below 18 years of age.

### Refugees and internally-displaced persons

Although operations by or against the PG have been too small to cause any notable displacement, the AFP 'Buliok offensive' against the MILF on the pretext of pursuing the PG in Liguasan Marsh did result in internal displacement on a large scale.

## Outlook

The PG has been decimated and contained, especially since the MILF began cooperating in its criminal interdiction, but has been able to survive in the Liguasan Marsh area. The group has survived the death of its founder, Marohombsar, and the reported death of Alonto. As a criminal gang, the PG cannot be party to peace negotiations. The best prospect for containing the PG would be to complete the peace process with the MILF, which would likely result in certain police powers to maintain peace and order as part of an arrangement for a higher degree of Moro self-determination and authority in their own areas. This would require the MILF to consolidate its rank and file.

## Abu Sofia

Abu Sofia (AS) is *not* a sub- or splinter group of the Pentagon Gang but a separate and distinct group. Military sources have described AS as 'a breakaway faction of the MILF engaged in banditry and kidnap-for-ransom activities' (Banlaoi, 2006). The link between the two groups might be little stronger than kinship association: its founding leader, Bedis Binago, is the brother of MILF unit commander Abdul Rahman Binago (ICG, 2005, pp. 13–14). Binago was killed in an encounter with government forces in Palimbang in early January 2005 (ICG, 2005, pp. 13–14). Days later, in apparent retaliation, company-sized MILF forces led by his brother, Abdul Rahman, and unit commander Ustadz Abdul Wahid Tundok attacked and overran army detachments in Mamasapano and Shariff Aguak towns in Maguindanao province (ICG, 2005, p. 13).

AS, which roamed the hinterlands of Sultan Kudarat and Saranggani provinces, first gained notice for the kidnapping of a Korean prospector in 2002.

The group is said to have facilitated the relocation of the group of ASG leader Khadaffy Janjalani and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) trainer Rahmat (aka Rohmat or Zaki) from the Zamboanga peninsula's southern coast across the Moro Gulf to Palimbang, Sultan Kudarat, in July 2003. It has also reportedly had an ongoing relationship with ASG elements in Sultan Kudarat and Saranggani, particularly with ASG leader Isnilon Hapnilon (ICG, 2005, pp. 12, 14).

Police intelligence sources say AS is composed of former MILF fighters and claims a force of more than 100 fully armed men, operating under the leadership of Salamo Macadengdeng (alias Commander Tropical, though at least two others have used the same alias) (Mendoza, 2002, pp. 16–47). According to military intelligence, however, the number was nearer 30 men at the group's height but has since collapsed following the death of Bedis Binago (Banlaoi, 2006). Binago's brother Alo was thought to have taken over as leader but was captured alongside two other brothers, Kalid and Manan, by a military task force during a raid in a village in Sultan Kudarat town (not province) in Maguindanao in July 2006, where they were supposedly planning a bomb attack (Fernandez and Alipala, 2006). AS is unlikely to have survived these events.

## Al-Khobar Gang

A relatively new armed group, referred to as the Al-Khobar Gang (AKG), emerged in 2007 and appears to have taken the place of the Pentagon Gang and Abu Sofia in Central and Southern Mindanao. AKG is essentially a criminal gang, not a rebel or terrorist group, though it has used passenger bus and terminal bombings as its 'signature' armed action to enforce its demands for money from private bus companies. Police and military authorities have said the attacks have nothing to do with terrorism: 'the motive is purely extortion' (Maitem, Fernandez, and Dinoy, 2007). The AKG is also suspected of a string of bombings of electric transmission towers in the Lanao area in early 2008. The group is thought to be led by Zabidi (or Habidi) Abdul, alias Bedz, supposedly a senior MILF commander and a member of its 'Special Operations Group' (current intelligence community parlance for 'lost command') (ICG, 2008, p. 5). The most recent news report—citing police sources—suggests, however, that the AKG is led by Salahuddin Hassan and Abdul Malik Salih (Fernandez and Maitem, 2009).

Police intelligence sources point to the forensic similarity of the 'bomb signatures' of the AKG to earlier bomb components and paraphernalia associated with JI and the MILF as evidence that the AKG has probably established links with JI and renegade MILF guerrillas. Police intelligence sources have also suggested—though without conclusive evidence—that the AKG is a special New People's Army (NPA) unit basically made up of Moro combatants; this supposed NPA connection of the AKG seems far-fetched, however, given what is known of the NPA's operations.[5]

## Other obscure Moro armed groups

From time to time, names of other obscure Moro armed groups appear in media reports. For example, in April 2006 a group calling itself the Urban Tigers Armed Group claimed responsibility for the late March 2006 bombing of a bus at a terminal in Digos City, Davao del Sur (Aguirre, 2006). Many such armed groups may exist in name only, created by terrorist groups to make themselves look bigger and more threatening or by counter-terrorists seeking a 'terrorist' enemy. ■

## Endnotes

1 Currency conversion rate as of 31 August 2004.

2 Currency conversion rate as of 15 August 2002.

3 Currency conversion rate as of 31 December 2002.

4 MILF spokesperson Eid Kabalu was quoted as saying: 'This is part of our commitment to help the government against organized crime and terrorism . . . It has been coordinated with the joint ceasefire committees and we approved it.' He said the MILF provided information on Pentagon gang leader Alonto Tahir's whereabouts. See *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (2004).

5 Anonymous police intelligence source, 'Updates on Terrorism', August 2007.

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## CHAPTER 23

# Indigenous People's Federal Army and Other Lumad Armed Groups

The Lumads are 18 or so indigenous highland tribes of Mindanao that have not been converted to Islam (some 13 Moro ethno-linguistic groups have been Islamized).[1] There are about 2 million Lumads who make up about 5 per cent of the Mindanao population. They are officially recognized as one of three peoples who share Mindanao, alongside the Moros (20 per cent of the population) and the Christian settler majority (75 per cent of the population).[2] The Lumads are the most marginalized of the tri-peoples and have been pushed to the highlands of their shrinking ancestral domain. Unlike the Moro groups, they have not tended to resort to armed struggle for self-determination, bar a few recent exceptions, such as the Indigenous People's Federal Army (IPFA) and the Bungkatol Liberation Army (BLA). These armed groups have not, however, attained the scale or lifespan of the Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA) of the Cordillera ethnic region in the northern Philippines, which remains the prime example of an indigenous people's armed group in the Philippines.

## Indigenous People's Federal Army (IPFA)

The IPFA is the most prominent Lumad armed group, even though it appeared to fizzle out in the same year it emerged. It announced its arrival in March 2002 by drawing media attention to a dozen dud bombs (lacking detonating devices) planted in various public places in Metro Manila and issuing a 'Federal Manifesto' calling for the creation of a governing system of three parallel federations, one for each of the tri-peoples (IPFA, 2002). Similar incidents followed in Mindanao. Some of the group's tribespeople paraded before the media in its Teduray tribal stronghold in South Upi, Maguindanao province, brandishing automatic and high-powered firearms, probably borrowed from sympathetic local armed groups (Unson, 2002).

There have been no other incidents involving the IPFA, despite its warnings in 2002 of further aggression should its call for federalism continue to be ignored. The IPFA therefore appears to be more of a propaganda effort than a real armed struggle, much less a terrorist threat. A former member of the Communist New People's Army (CPP-NPA) who had contact with the group said it 'does not want to hurt civilians, is different from the Abu Sayyaf Group, and is a defensive army' (Vitug, 2002).

The IPFA had about 100 members in 2002, including former members of the CPP-NPA and disgruntled members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), based in Central Mindanao. Rogelio Adamat of the Teduray tribe, who has worked with the government's National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, is suspected of being the group's leader (*MindaNews*, 2002). Adamat represents an element of frustration and desperation among Lumads in their otherwise peaceful struggle to preserve their ancestral domains. The group's spokesperson reportedly goes by the names 'Fedrev' (for Federal Revolution), 'Adrev' (for Ancestral Domain Revolution) (WTG-IU, 2002; Fernandez, 2002). In terms of tri-people orientation and geographical location, the IPFA is closest to the Communist breakaway faction Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa-Mindanao (RPM-M, Revolutionary Workers Party-Mindanao).

## Bungkatol Liberation Army (BLA)

The BLA is the armed force of the Bungkatol Liberation Front (BULIF), representing a small Lumad group in the Agusan provinces of the Caraga region of north-eastern Mindanao. The BLA, originally called 'Alimaong Warriors', took up arms to protect Bungkatol ancestral lands, customs, and traditions through what it calls 'tribal war'. It gained notoriety when it temporarily 'arrested' a regional technical director of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Christopher Quizon, in May 2004 for his alleged neglect of their ancestral domain claims and facilitating illegal logging in the region. The local Catholic bishop helped negotiate Quizon's release. Group commander Datu Selakan Kalasag issued the 'arrest warrant' and formed the arresting team.[3]

BULIF comprises mostly Manobo and Higaonon tribespeople, based in Esperanza, Agusan del Sur. In the 1980s, the military reportedly used these tribespeople for the counter-insurgency drive against the Communist New People's Army (NPA) in the hinterlands of Agusan del Sur and the neighbouring Surigao provinces (Caliguid, 2004). The group is led by a *Datu Buhay* (life chieftain) and a council of elders. The BLA operates in one of the areas of the NPA but has no links to the group; in fact, there is conflict between them.[4]

The BLA might be more inclined to align itself with the RPM-M, which has encouraged defence-building among the Lumad along traditional indigenous lines. Such Lumad armed groups rarely appear in the media, though they have some sustainable foundations and are unlikely to fizzle out like the IPFA.

## Other Lumad armed groups

Other Lumad armed groups, both pro- and anti-state, are thought to exist, but they have tended to remain obscure. One pro-state (unlike the anti-state IPFA and BLA) Lumad armed group that caught the attention of the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples is the LUPACA-Bagani Warriors set up by the Philippine military in the Caraga region to fight the NPA there. The group has staged fake NPA 'surrenders' in an effort to gain public support (Stavenhagen, 2003). Recently, a Lumad militia belonging to the Dibabawon tribe was reported to have accompanied elements of the Philippine Army's 28th Infantry Battalion during raids on houses in a tribal village near the site of an NPA ambush in Compostela Valley province in Mindanao (Tupas, 2007).

The overall trend, however, is away from the formation of separate, autonomous Lumad armed groups. Instead, Lumad tribespeople are being recruited into the various state and non-state armed forces operating in Mindanao, not always in service of Lumad interests. ■

## Endnotes

1 International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 'Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines.' <http://www.iwgia.org/sw16704.asp>

2 Based on government statistics of registered births. See National Statistics Office (2005) and Rodriguez (2008).

3 The *Manila Times* (2007) and supporting papers attached to a letter from Datu Buhay-Ruben Dapenagan, President, Tribal Coalition of Mindanao to Rep. Mujiv S. Hataman of Anak Mindanao (AMIN) party-list group dated 2 June 2004.

4 Supporting papers attached to a letter from Datu Buhay-Ruben Dapenagan (see n. 3 above).

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# CHAPTER 24

# Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Other Indonesian/ Malaysian Jihadi Groups

This chapter focuses on Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the leading foreign jihadi group in the Philippines. Rather than offer a detailed profiling, the chapter explores the nature and extent of Philippines operations of JI and other Indonesian and Malaysian jihadi groups and their ties to local armed groups on the Moro/ Muslim front. The International Crisis Group (ICG) has conducted the most sustained and detailed research on JI. It must be noted that it has made extensive use of the interrogation depositions of JI members captured after the first Bali bombing of October 2002, perpetrated by JI.

## Origins and orientation

JI emerged as a formal organization in the early 1990s. It was founded by two Indonesian exiles in Malaysia who would be its first two *amirs* (leaders), Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, both of Central Java. Sungkar, in particular, rooted JI in the Darul Islam (DI) rebellions of the 1950s, which aimed to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia but, by the mid-1960s, had been suppressed by the Indonesian Army (Gunaratna, 2006). Ba'asyir and Sungkar sporadically reactivated the movement in South Sulawesi, Java, and Sumatra during the 1970s and 1980s, eventually establishing a Jemaah Islamiyah network, meaning 'community/ies of Islam'—though this was far from the unitary organization that exists today. In the mid-1990s, influenced by their contact with Usama Rushdi of Gama Islami—the radical breakaway faction of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood—Ba'asyir and Sungkar shifted to a more radical, pan-Islamic call for an international Islamic caliphate (Barton, 2005, pp. 46–52).

All of JI's top leaders and many of its bombers trained in *mujahideen* (Islamic warrior) camps in Afghanistan from 1985 to 1995, particularly in the camps of

Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, the Afghan mujahideen commander with the closest Saudi links.[1] Also pivotal to the group's development was the fact that many of its leaders were tutored at *pesantrens* (Muslim boarding schools) that propagate jihadi Islamism, specifically Pesantren al-Mukmin (Pondok Ngruki) which was founded by Ba'asyir in 1971 near Solo, Central Java (Gunaratna, 2006).

JI is still essentially an Indonesian organization with an Indonesian agenda, though some counter-terrorism analysts have described it as having evolved in three phases from a local to a regional jihad group (encompassing Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines) and, finally, to a global jihad group via its contacts with al-Qaeda (Gunaratna, 2006).

## JI's ideology

Although focused on the Indonesian jihad, JI's ideology of jihadi Islamism allows it to participate in regional and global jihad. Its ideology puts a premium on jihad, particularly the struggle—often including by means of terrorism—against opponents of an all-encompassing Islamization of society. Jihadi Islamism combines pre-modern Saudi Wahhabi/Salafi 'purist' Islam with the more recent ideas of Sayyid Qutb and his Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood movement. Of particular significance is Qutb's doctrine of *jahiliyya*, which sees all human society as having been brought back to a state of spiritual ignorance and depravity since being ruled by human authority rather than Allah as embodied in *sharia'ah* (Islamic law), derived mainly from the Qur'an. Still, it is important to note that JI's jihadi Islamism is articulated against the backdrop of Indonesia's specific political and social context, which includes failures of governance under the secular nationalism of President Sukarno (1945–67), the military repression and corruption of President Suharto (1967–98), and the moderate Islam of President Adburrahman Wahid (1999–2001) (Barton, 2005, pp. 25–43).

One counter-terrorism analyst contends, however, that:

> *though its roots were in Southeast Asia, JI's ideological outlook became increasingly 'Arabized,' and developed a strong orientation toward the Middle East, most notably toward Saudi Arabia and Egypt . . . Al Qaeda's overarching dominant*

> *ideology was successful in 'hijacking' JI's parochial ideology. Today, JI is driven more by its newly acquired ideology of global jihad than by its original, more local agenda.* (Gunaratna, 2006)

## JI, al-Qaeda, and the South-east Asian terrorist network

A number of counter-terrorism analysts have depicted JI as al-Qaeda's regional affiliate in South-east Asia (Abuza, 2002a; 2002b). This notion, however, has been debunked by ICG researchers who conclude that 'even during the period of closest ties [1997–2002], JI was very much an independent organization with its own agenda' (see Jones, 2005, p. 172).

Others have pointed to JI's role in creating the Rabitat-ul Mujahideen (Legion of Mujahideen), a clandestine umbrella organization of South-east Asian Islamist armed groups, including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Laskar Jundullah, Free Aceh Movement (GAM), Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), Arakan Rohingya Nationalist Organization (ARNO), and Jemaah Salafiya of Thailand (Gunaratna, 2006). One journalist, who has focused on JI, says 'although each of these groups has a separate leadership structure, for specific operations, *they act essentially as part of the Jemaah Islamiyah and al-Qaeda terror network*' (Ressa, 2003, p. xii, emphasis added). Yet no evidence of such an umbrella organization has emerged beyond a few meetings in 1999 and 2000. The groups are disparate in character, objectives, and geography; and many pre-date JI. Some groups might be able to make use of JI rather than the other way around.

## JI's size and strength in the Philippines

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) estimates that JI operatives based in the Philippines numbered 'around 30' in 2006 (Esperon, 2006, p. 6). This relatively small force has had a large impact due to its networking with local Moro/Muslim armed groups, such as the MILF, ASG, and Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM), and its key role in a significant number of terrorist bombings. Unlike local armed groups that mainly use small arms and light weapons, the JI operatives—who also carry small arms—have more typically used bombs, particularly against civilian targets.

In 2003, JI had been 'considered the greatest threat to stability in the Philippines', with 'hundreds' of 'heavily armed and well-financed' JI members, mostly Indonesian, in Mindanao, according to counter-terrorism intelligence sources (Elegant, 2003). The depletion from 'hundreds' in 2003 to 'around 30' in 2006 can be attributed to improved intelligence work leading to raids and arrests.

The ICG's key analyst on JI noted in 2004 that, although JI still had an estimated 2,000 operatives throughout South-east Asia, it had been infiltrated by intelligence assets, was running short of funds, and was facing a public increasingly intolerant of terrorism, including in its home country of Indonesia (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2004).

## 'Structural' JI and the MILF

From about 1996 to 2003, JI consolidated its regional structure though a military-type organization anchored by four *mantiqis* (brigades) representing territorial divisions, each responsible for a different aspect of the group's work: economic support (Mantiqi I), jihad efforts (II), training (III), and fundraising (IV). Mindanao (southern Philippines) is part of Mantiqi III, which also includes Sabah, Sulawesi, and eastern Kalimantan. Its leader for Mindanao was Nasirr Abbas, though the JI's battalion in Mindanao (called Wakalah Hudaibiya, or WakHud) was headed by Ahmad Faisal bin Imam Sarijan (Zulkifli) (ICG, 2005, p. 9).

Mindanao's main value to JI is the MILF's infrastructure of camps, which could be used for military training of and by JI (ICG, 2004, pp. 13–25). It also served as a place of refuge for JI leaders, instructors, and trainees, since Mindanao is relatively accessible through a porous maritime border with northern Indonesia and eastern Malaysia. In turn, the MILF—or certain sections of it—benefited through training, finances, logistics, networks, and alliances. The ICG traces the JI–MILF connection to personal acquaintances and friendships between JI leaders Sungkar and Zulkarnaen and the MILF's founding Chairman Salamat Hashim forged in the mid-1980s in the training camps and battlefields of Pakistan and Afghanistan (ICG, 2004, pp. 14, 17).

The most prominent senior JI operative to have been linked to the MILF is Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi, an explosives expert who developed close ties to two MILF fighters while teaching at a JI-run training camp in Torkham, Afghanistan, in 1993–94. It was al-Ghozi's arrest in Manila in January 2002 that finally exposed a JI–MILF connection (ICG, 2004, pp. 13–15). Any institutional collaboration between the two groups was ruptured when long-time military chief and chief peace negotiator Al-Haj Murad Ebrahim took over from Hashim as MILF chairman in 2003. Since then, the MILF has distanced itself from JI and has helped the AFP in its efforts to interdict JI and related terrorist groups.

## 'Non-structural' JI, 'freelance' jihadis, and Abu Sayyaf

The JI's Mantiqi III and its WakHud in Mindanao reportedly collapsed after the Indonesian and Malaysian police arrested suspects for the Bali bombing in October 2002 (ICG, 2005, p. 9; Collier, 2006, p. 30). Some Java- and Sulawesi-based militants drew on their own networks to flee Indonesian police for the relative sanctuary of Mindanao. It is these fugitives who are referred to as the 'non-structural' JI or as 'freelance' jihadis. Most prominent among them are senior JI operatives and Bali bombers Dulmatin and Umar Patek, who used a Darul Islam (DI) contact to reach Mindanao and link up with Abdulbasit Usman, the most senior remaining 'structural' WakHud operative. They also established a relationship with the ASG, particularly its two top leaders Khadaffy Janjalani and Abu Solaiman (ICG, 2005, p. 9). Janjalani and Solaiman were killed in September 2006 and January 2007, respectively, in a US-supported military attack. The 2008 ICG report on Mindanao indicates that Umar Patek is the top commander among the foreign jihadis there (ICG, 2008, p. 19).

The ICG notes that JI 'never had a monopoly on *jihadi* Indonesian activity in Mindanao. Other offshoots of the old DI insurgency had independent relationships with MILF commanders, going back to before JI moved its training camps there from Afghanistan in 1994' (ICG, 2005, pp. 9–10). For example, inside the MILF's former main Camp Abu Bakar, the JI-run Camp Hudaibiyah coexisted with two other camps. These included Camp Al Fatih, run by Waddah Islamiyah, which later became the Laskar Jundullah training centre for non-JI fighters from Sulawesi, and Camp Ash Syabab, run initially by DI and later by

KOMPAK (a DI organization based in Sulawesi) for fighters from Banten, West Java. 'Non-structural' JI operatives, such as Dulmatin and Umar Patek, were said to be closer to KOMPAK and DI than to 'structural' JI or WakHud. JI members in Jakarta have described these 'non-structural' JI operatives as operating virtually independently of the larger JI (ICG, 2005, pp. 9–10, 17).

One of the captured 'freelance' jihadis is Agus Dwikarna of South Sulawesi, who has been identified as a leader of both Waddah Islamiyah[2] and the jihadi Islamist militia Laskar Jundullah. He admits only to the former, which he describes as 'like an NGO', running a modern rather than traditional pesantren in which the teaching of Islam is not oriented towards jihad.[3] He also claims never to have heard of JI until he was arrested in March 2002 upon arrival at a Philippine airport.[4] Recent news reports describe Dwikarna as a JI member, but this is likely to reflect a tendency of the Philippine media to conflate all Indonesian jihadi groups with JI, rather than his actual affiliation (Salaverria, 2007).

## JI's pattern of collaboration with Philippine armed groups

According to ICG research, the Superferry bombing of 2004 and Valentine Day's bombings of 2005 illustrate the links among Philippine and Indonesian jihadist groups (see also Chapter 21). Both were apparently executed at the primary direction of the ASG leaders Khadaffy Janjalani and Abu Solaiman by Balik-Islam ('Return to Islam') converts connected to the RSM and trained by JI operatives under MILF protection (namely, a defence cordon commanded by an ethnic Iranun officer codenamed 'Zero-Five' around the RSM training camp Medina, which is near the JI training camp Jabal Quba in Mount Kararao, Central Mindanao). In the particular case of the Valentine's Day bus bombing in Makati City, the sequence of captured mobile phone messages among leaders and operatives of the ASG, JI, and RSM show a top ASG leader calling the shots—overruling the top RSM leader—seconded by the JI principal instructor, while the actual bombing operation was carried out by low-level RSM and ASG operatives (ICG, 2005, pp. 16–18).

Filipino victims of JI-related bombings now rival in number those in Indonesia, while Indonesian jihadis trained and exposed in Mindanao may outnumber those who are veterans of Afghanistan (Collier, 2006, p. 34). The majority of those who have returned home to Indonesia have disappeared from view and, so far, have not been involved in the bombing of Western targets (ICG, 2005, p. 10). No Filipino (or Thai) nationals have actually been inducted into JI, though there have been news reports of arrests of a few Filipinos described by military sources as members or suspected members of JI (ICG, 2005 p. 25; Jones, 2005, p. 175; Maitem, 2007; Burgonio, 2004).

## JI's prospects in the Philippines

By 2005, JI's surviving members in Mindanao were forced into closer cooperation with local insurgents as well as 'freelance' Indonesian and Malaysian jihadis operating outside of the now depleted JI structure (Collier, 2006, p. 30). With regard to local insurgents, JI has reached out to the ASG as a more reliable and radical partner than the post-Hashim MILF (Abuza, 2005, pp. 21–24). While the primary focus of JI operatives in the Philippines remains the struggle in Indonesia, the group has been drawn into its hosts' struggle. Some Indonesian jihadis appear to be staying on in Mindanao after completing their training and adopting the Moro struggle as their own. According to one study, a number of JI members in Java—still its stronghold—consider those JI fugitives in Mindanao to be 'more ASG than JI' (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007).

To look to the future, JI and other foreign jihadi groups in the Philippines now have far less room to manoeuvre—whether for training or refuge—due to two recent developments. The first is the strategic distancing of the MILF from JI since 2003, resulting in JI's loss of access to the MILF's Central Mindanao infrastructure of camps, though 'weak links' may still exist between rogue field commanders with personal or tactical ties to JI operatives. The second is the intensified military and police operations against the ASG and the JI operatives embedded within it, which have decimated the ASG leadership and caused some JI casualties. History suggests that both the ASG and JI are likely to lie low and regroup in the short term, which might entail diversionary attacks. The outcome of the Mindanao peace process involving both the MILF and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) will be influential. The latter shares the same Sulu home ground as the ASG. If the ongoing government–MILF peace negotiations result in a settlement that allows for a higher degree of Moro self-determination and addresses the group's Islamic aspirations, the ASG call to arms might lose its resonance with its support base.

The ideas of radical and jihadi Islamism thrive where there is frustration with Muslim affairs and no viable alternative to armed struggle. Given the current restrictions on JI in the Philippines, there may be a pulling back—or even pulling out—from the Moro front and a return to the Indonesian locus of jihad. Moreover, given the lack of popular support for JI in Indonesia, the struggle for the country's Islamic soul may henceforth be fought along political rather than military lines (Beech, 2007). In the final analysis, the fate of JI and other Indonesian jihadi groups depends on the outcome of that struggle in Indonesia, not in the Philippines.

## Small arms and light weapons

Most operations attributed to JI have involved the use of bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Attacks have utilized potassium chlorate and ammonium nitrate—which is readily available in Indonesia and the Philippines for agricultural purposes and remains easily obtainable, despite recent restrictions. The bombs used in the 1 October 2005 Bali explosions are believed to have been based on a charge of TNT surrounded by ball bearings and other improvised shrapnel (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007).

JI has access to small arms and assault weapons, which are used for personal protection and armed robberies. Sizeable weapons caches were discovered in May 2005 in West Ceram, Maluki, and in Sukoharo, Solo, in March 2007. Both cities are in Indonesia (Jane's Strategic Advisory Services, 2007).

A number of JI members based in the Philippines have been compelled to enter the small arms and light weapons market for financial reasons, buying in Mindanao and selling in Indonesia (ICG, 2005, pp. 12, 20–21; Jones, 2005, pp. 175–76).

## Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia and the Philippines

Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM) is a Malaysian jihadi group with far less relevance to the Philippines than JI. It was formed in 1995 by leaders of the Halaqah Pakindo, a clandestine movement of alumni of Masapakindo (Student Association of Pakistan, India, and Indonesia Graduates) which operated under the aegis of the Islamic opposition political party Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS). KMM sought religious purity among Malay Muslims; the protection, preservation, and promotion of PAS—albeit without the knowledge of the latter's leaders; and, in the long term, the implementation of shari'ah and an Islamic state in Malaysia. It shared the vision of an Islamic state in the region covering Malaysia, Indonesia, southern Philippines, and southern Thailand, though decided against joining the Rabitatul Mujahidin (Abdullah, 2005, pp. 40–41).[5]

The most prominent KMM leader is Nik Adli Nik Abdul Aziz, son of the PAS spiritual leader and Chief Minister for Kelantan state Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat. Nik Adli and some ten other leaders and members of KMM were arrested in August 2001 and continue to be detained under Malaysia's stringent Internal Security Act after a botched bank robbery attempt was linked to the group (Pereira, 2001; Elegant, 2001). This has largely neutralized the group. Since then, Zulkifli bin Hir (also known as Marwan or Musa Abdul) has emerged as KMM head. He used to lead the more radical Selangor cell, which had the closest links with JI leaders Hambali and Ba'asyir, and he has even been described as a 'senior JI figure' (Abdullah, 2005, p. 41; ICG, 2003, pp. 21–22).

Marwan left Malaysia to elude the police dragnet, and is believed to have been based mainly in Mindanao since August 2003. He reportedly linked up with Dulmatin and Umar Patek in 2003 and was reportedly sighted with the ASG in 2005. He is the one Malaysian on the list of 53 terror suspects which the Philippine government provided to the MILF for interdiction (ICG, 2005, pp. 9, 14). Aside from this, there is little information about any role he or the KMM might play in Mindanao. The US State Department recently offered USD 5 million for information leading to his capture, saying he is 'thought to run the [KMM] and be a member of the central command of [JI], the Al-Qaeda affiliate' (Balana, 2007). This estimation of his role appears to be overblown not least because the KMM itself seems to have become inactive in its home country. ■

## Endnotes

1 Interestingly, he also inspired the Moro rebel jihadi group Abu Sayyaf (ASG), with which the JI later collaborated.

2 Waddah Islamiyah is described as 'run(ning) a 1,000-student Islamic academy in the eastern city of Makassar, where many girls wear chadors that cover everything but their eyes' (Beech, 2007, p. 17).

3 Agus Dwikarna, a leader of Waddah Islamiyah, interview by Soliman M. Santos, Jr. at New Bilibid Prison, Muntinlupa City on 21 May 2006.

4 Interview of Agus Dwikarna by Soliman M. Santos, Jr.

5 The KMM's radical Selangor cell was in favour of joining but was overruled by the group's leaders at a meeting reportedly held among JI, KMM, and unidentified representatives from the Philippines and Thailand.

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# Conclusion

## Soliman M. Santos, Jr. and Diana Rodriguez

With its detailed individual group profiles and analytical chapters on terrorism; disarmament, demilitarization, and reintegration (DDR); and small arms and light weapons, this book is as much an assessment of human security efforts in the Philippines as it is a review of the armed groups currently active in the country. While the focus is the non-state armed groups on the Communist and Moro fronts of armed conflict, this volume inevitably touches on their state and parastatal opponents. The state security forces and their paramilitary proxies complete a picture of a society in which certain regions are highly militarized and in which human security, economic and political development, and well-being are compromised.

The discussion of parastatal or pro-state groups—that is, official civilian auxiliaries to the military and police, unauthorized anti-Communist or anti-Moro vigilante groups, and the private armies set up by politicians in some parts of the country (Chapters 8 and 9)—helps to clarify our definition of 'armed group'. Fundamental to the term is that these groups hold small arms and light weapons, have political or quasi-political objectives, and challenge the state's monopoly of legitimate force. The latter two elements, namely, the *role of politics* and the *question of legitimacy*, warrant further examination, however. In this conclusion, we assess legitimacy by asking what redeeming value, if any, non-state armed groups have for society, and whether they can be part of the resolution of human security and development problems. These questions gain renewed importance in view of the actions of parastatal groups that erode the legitimacy of official security forces as well as the government's new peace policy towards rebel groups.

## Shifting policies on the root causes of conflict

As the Philippines' twin conflicts enter their fifth decade, the government has not renounced its ambition of defeating the rebels militarily, even though history shows that this outcome is unlikely. While some of the armed groups have few members and muddled ideological underpinnings, the more significant among them, such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Communist New People's Army (CPP-NPA-NDFP), are heavily armed, well-trained organizations that have established the necessary politico-military infrastructure and historico-social capital over wide areas of the countryside to sustain and even intensify their struggles. Even the 'small but terrible' Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) has confounded the Philippine military, in spite of significant counter-terrorism assistance from the United States and the fact that official troop numbers are swollen by the many parastatals and private armies deployed against them (Chapters 8 and 9).

The insurgents are just as unlikely to win military victories, however. The CPP-NPA-NDFP will probably remain stuck in the strategic defensive stage of its protracted people's war. The MILF and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)—even if they join forces for a resumption of armed struggle—are limited to the containable Muslim areas of Central and South Western Mindanao, respectively.

In tandem with the armed conflict, unfinished peace negotiations with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) and the MILF have been ongoing since 1992 and 1996, respectively—and, in the case of the MILF, this followed 21 years in three phases of peace negotiations with the MNLF. While the peace processes have been less costly than the conflicts in both human and monetary terms—and have yet to become as protracted—there is understandable frustration on both sides with the lack of progress. The government has recently changed tack in the hope of finally resolving the conflicts by sidelining the rebel groups in favour of 'authentic dialogues' with communities and aiming to decouple them from their support bases. DDR becomes the framework of government engagement with all armed groups.

The government's new policy argument is that the root causes espoused by the two insurgencies—essentially structural inequities and various injustices, whether due to elite control over key aspects of the economy, politics, and society to the detriment of the broad masses of the people, or due to Christian Filipino majority blocking of Muslim Moro minority aspirations of better self-determination (Chapters 1 and 3)—do not justify armed struggle, since not all afflicted areas have resorted to rebellion. In this view, the root-cause paradigm is used as an excuse to bear arms against the government. (This is diametrically opposed to the view of rebel groups for whom bearing arms—and their concomitant proven willingness to kill and be killed for their causes—underpins their claim to a legitimate place at the negotiating table since it is only their force of arms that attracts the serious attention of government.)

Yet the insurgencies are not only reactions to injustice and inequity; they are also ideologically driven, offering alternative state visions of a national-democratic or socialist state and Bangsamoro or Islamic state, respectively. Hence, the perceived legitimacy of armed groups is buoyed to some degree by news of corruption, human rights violations, or other aspects of misgovernment by the state. Theirs is, to use a current psychological term, a 'purpose-driven' struggle. It is this ideologically driven aspect that is now being downplayed in the government's new peace policy on rebel groups.

The new government policy carries risks. By demoting negotiations with rebel groups, the credibility of peace processes will be undermined, possibly sparking a return to armed struggle and military operations, though some armed groups might be weakened in the short term. Only a peace process involving political negotiations can deal with root causes in a way that even a successful military campaign cannot. Moreover, the armed conflict with rebel groups—which still serve as political interlocutors for significant sectors—can only be addressed with them, not by bypassing them purportedly to dialogue with the communities in which they operate.

## Crises of legitimacy

It is simplistic to state unequivocally that non-state armed groups should be part of the solution to human security and development problems, however. This depends on the armed groups themselves and the human security efforts in which they and the state are engaged.

To turn first to the armed groups, there are examples that show they can indeed be part of the solution. Most notable is the MILF's engagement in the remarkable 'three-in-one' ceasefire (Box 3.2) with the Philippine government for peace negotiations (not new), for rehabilitation and development (new), and for criminal interdiction (new). Cooperation in criminal interdiction through an Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) has led to dozens of successful rescues of kidnapping-for-ransom victims. The model became all the more important in 2008 when a spate of hostage takings took place in Western Mindanao, most of them implicating ASG or ASG-linked elements. Although ostensibly an anti-crime agreement, the AHJAG contributes to counter-terrorism operations as well. The most notable cooperation was against the ASG's main group led by Khadaffy Janjalani in Central Mindanao in 2005, which was forced to retreat to Sulu, where its leaders—including Janjalani—were subsequently killed. In this instance, the MILF not only shared intelligence with the Armed Force of the Philippines (AFP) but expelled the ASG leaders and their foreign jihadi allies from MILF territory, allowed the AFP to operate in this territory, and averted MILF–AFP hostilities (ICG, 2008, pp. 10–11). Although the AHJAG's mandate has since expired, the agreement continues to function de facto.

Another positive example is the peace process with the Communist breakaway faction Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Mindanao (RPM-M) (Box 1.2). The key feature of this process is participatory local community consultation to identify problems and needs. It provides a good example of 'authentic dialogue' with communities, but, crucially, shows that such consultation can be combined with high-level political negotiations with armed groups. These two levels of dialogue are not mutually exclusive, much less counterposed as they would be under the government's new peace policy. Indeed, the RPM-M has explicitly stated that rebel groups are *among* the legitimate stakeholders of the peace processes (RPM-M Peace Committee, 2008).

Unfortunately, there are as many examples of abusive and brutal behaviour by armed groups. The prime culprit is the ASG. We also note reports that certain groups, such as the Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA) and the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas (RPM-P), have engaged in criminal activity or even hired themselves out as 'private armies' to local business and political leaders. Even the better-trained CPP-NPA and MILF have committed atrocities against civilians. The attacks led by three so-called rogue commanders of the MILF—which does not consider them 'rogue'—against Christian communities in Central Mindanao in August 2008 following an aborted peace deal raise questions about the MILF's avowed adherence to human rights and international humanitarian law as well as its leadership's control over its field commanders.

As for the CPP-NPA, its 'revolutionary taxation'—occasionally reinforced by attacks on mining, logging, and other civilian businesses—has dented support for the group in many quarters. And in this instance it cannot shift the blame to the actions of a few recalcitrant members, since taxation is a nationwide policy of the group. More damning is a series of killings of leaders and members of peasant organizations credibly attributed to the group in Masbate island province (see Chapter 2) and in Bondoc Peninsula in recent years.

There has been a growing trend within the government security and peace sectors to treat and refer to the main rebel groups such as the CPP-NPA and sections of the MILF as 'armed elements engaged in acts of lawlessness'. The military has coined a new abbreviation, LMG, for 'lawless MILF group', and the government has been building criminal cases against rebel leaders, members, and supporters. This legal offensive serves to degrade certain rebel groups politically, since the term 'lawless elements' connotes criminality. It is, in effect, a sophisticated form of counter-insurgency that violates one of the guiding principles of the government's comprehensive peace efforts: 'A comprehensive peace process seeks a principled and peaceful resolution of the internal armed conflicts, with neither blame nor surrender, but with dignity for all concerned' (Macapagal-Arroyo, 2001, section 3(c); Ramos, 1993, section 2(c).).

Such events threaten the legitimacy claimed by rebel groups. Athanasios Moulakis argues that legitimacy is 'nothing but the regard in which a polity is held by its members: the extent to which that polity is thought to be worthy of support' (Moulakis, 1986). If this is held to be true, then legitimacy is an especially fragile commodity for rebel groups, who do not enjoy it—as the government generally does—by dint of being elected and being recognized in the international system of states. It becomes a particularly valuable commodity if rebel groups submit to peace negotiations with a view to transforming themselves into viable actors—possibly no longer non-state—in the post-settlement period. We shall come back to this possible transformation later. But, before that, there are other dimensions to the legitimacy question.

## Storm clouds on the international horizon: the terrorism question

In her thesis on internationally supervised peace processes, Ewa Mimmi Söderberg reminds us that legitimization of rebel groups depends not only on their domestic constituencies but also on the international community (Söderberg, 2004). Indeed, international support has been important for maintaining the momentum of the peace process and the ceasefire on the Moro front. On the Communist front of the CPP-NPA-NDFP, however, the effect of the international community on the conflict has been negative. The influence of the group's natural international allies has waned since the demise of the Soviet bloc and the reorientation of China. In contrast, the United States heightened its involvement by adding the CPP-NPA and its leader Jose Maria Sison to its terrorist blacklist in 2002 and ratcheting up military aid to the Philippine government. That the US 'terrorist' listing was welcomed—if not actively supported—by the Philippine government became the NDFP's *casus belli* to suspend the formal peace talks in 2004.

In terms of the various definitions of terrorism explored in Chapter 4, the inclusion of the CPP-NPA in terrorist listings is erroneous. What it demonstrates is the dangerous conflation of terrorist groups with insurgent groups in the international anti-terror discourse. The International Crisis Group (ICG) usefully disentangles the two types of groups:

> *Terrorists deliberately and systematically target civilians in pursuit of non-negotiable goals, and score relatively low on the other two indices [possession of political infrastructure and control of population and territory]—reflecting their lack of* legitimacy. *Insurgent movements with negotiable demands, political infrastructure, popular constituencies and territorial control are less likely to depend on terrorist tactics and are more readily held to account for their actions, especially when engaged in peace processes.* (ICG, 2008, p. 2, emphasis added)

The CPP-NPA, like the MILF and MNLF, falls into the second category.

Although the MILF is not on the US 'terrorist' list, the Philippine government has once again—understandably, in the wake of the recent atrocities which include acts of terrorism against civilian communities—contemplated adding the group's 'rogue commanders', if not the group itself, to its list of terrorist entities (Dizon, 2008). This would involve the test implementation of the proscription of terrorist organizations or 'group(s) of persons' under the first Philippine anti-terrorism law, the Human Security Act of 2007, which has no provision for terrorist *individuals* and has been challenged on constitutional grounds in a case currently before the Philippine Supreme Court.

The peace process can provide collateral benefits to the war on terror, the clearest example being the AHJAG (Chapters 3 and 4). Unfortunately, the opposite is also true: thus, the breakdown in the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP)–MILF peace process carries a number of risks. First, the MILF's more radical elements could grow despondent about the negotiations and consider more drastic options, including tactical alliances with terrorist groups. Second, the MILF leadership itself could lose enthusiasm for its intelligence-sharing agreement with the government. And third—the worst-case scenario—the mainstream MILF or its leadership could be compelled to pursue war because its preferred 'Peace Path' becomes unviable. A war would bring guns, violence, and confusion, thereby providing more favourable conditions for terrorism, to the further detriment of human security efforts in the *legitimate* fight against terrorism.

## Human security efforts assessed

The book casts a critical eye over the Philippine state's efforts to tackle the human security dimension of the two armed conflicts. By far the most important such efforts relevant to armed groups are the peace processes, which involve political negotiation. Other human security measures, such as ceasefires and DDR, are best carried out as part of a broader peace process. Similarly, security sector reform, small arms control, and even counter-terrorism can be—and have been—constructively rolled into a peace package.

The main indictment against several successive administrations is that their policies on peace have been incoherent. Peace policies have often been informed by counter-insurgency—either military victory or pacification and demobilization—and, lately, counter-terrorism, rather than by an honest desire to resolve conflict and build peace institutionally. It is this policy incoherence that has undermined peace negotiations, even when there is a supposed final agreement, such as that signed with the MNLF in 1996.

Of course, because peace negotiations are generally two-sided affairs, the counterpart rebel policy on peace also has a role to play. There is a strategic difference between the two main peace negotiations with the MILF and with the NDFP. In the former, the parties have made a strategic decision to back peace negotiations as the route to resolving their armed conflict and achieving their respective political objectives. Their different perspectives account for the prolongation of the process, but, fundamentally, the parties involved agree on the value of the negotiations. Despite their differences, and even with the August 2008 breakdown in the GRP–MILF peace negotiations, this unfinished process still offers the best possible outcome on the Moro front. It could be the catalyst for peace with other armed groups or—if inconclusive—for radicalization of the next generation of insurgents.

The GRP–NDFP peace negotiations, on the other hand, have tended to be treated by the parties as a tactical political manoeuvre for continuation of their conflict. The negotiations have fallen victim not only to a difference in perspective but also to a degree of insincerity on either side. In the absence of a ceasefire, the only available common human security measure is an interim agreement to respect human rights and international humanitarian law, but even this has been prejudiced by the belligerent dispositions of both parties. For now, a resolution on this main Communist front looks unlikely to come either from within the arena of peace talks or from the arena of war; rather, it may come through gradual change in the domestic political environment.

It is important to remember the smaller 'other peace processes' with Communist breakaway factions, such as the CPLA, the RPM-P, and the RPM-M. In the absence of progress in the larger and apparently intractable peace processes, gains can be made in these smaller and presumably easier processes.

## New attention to DDR

DDR deserves increased attention given its place in the government's new peace policy towards armed groups. The Philippines has some experience of DDR—albeit partial—with at least three armed groups: the CPLA, the military rebels of 1986–89, and the MNLF (Chapters 6 and 7). Given the government's past record of using DDR as a counter-insurgency measure aimed at undermining rebel groups rather than facilitating their transition to civilian life, these groups are unlikely to welcome the new modus operandi. Indeed, recent exploratory discussions with the MILF on DDR suggest that the very term 'DDR' is off-putting to most rebel groups.

To the extent that DDR is—rightly—treated as part of a wider peace process, its make-up will depend on the concept, design, and implementation of the process concerned. This key finding is not new. A 1996 assessment of global DDR experiences concluded that DDR comprises not merely a set of managerial or administrative challenges but also 'intensely political processes whose long-term and sustainable impact depend on parallel efforts of political and economic reconstruction to resolve, or ameliorate as far as possible, the root causes of conflict' (Berdal, 1996). We emphasize this because it brings us back to the *root causes* of conflict. The government's new peace policy ignores the lessons of global—and indeed Philippine—experience.

By homing in on the Philippine experience, we glean new insights. For example, MNLF integration into the AFP and Philippine National Police (PNP) shows the value of factoring in the rebel perspective when designing DDR in a bilateral process (Chapter 7). In particular, since the MNLF represents a struggle for the right of self-determination, the DDR process that accompanies it must include elements of self-determination. We find also that, in the MNLF's main island province base of Sulu, DDR should be linked to demilitarization, because a pulling back by the Philippine military might leave a gap for a greater autonomous security role for the MNLF.

In Sulu and elsewhere, DDR efforts are undermined when the AFP, the PNP, and local political leaders are simultaneously arming civilian auxiliaries, vigilante groups, or private armies. At the front lines of the conflicts—where guns are readily available, government institutions are absent, and the spoils of politics are fought over by feuding clans—society is highly militarized, and it is difficult to trace clear battle lines. The broader insurgency has sometimes been grafted onto personal political feuds and vice versa, particularly in Mindanao, where the Moro rebel groups and parastatal armed groups have been dragged into conflicts between rival political families.

## Politics as usual

The challenge facing rebel groups that submit to peace processes is how they can maintain their relevance in the post-settlement period—a challenge made all the more difficult given the patronage politics that prevail in parts of the Philippines, as alluded to above. Among the features of rebel groups, as enumerated by Söderberg (2004), that can affect their survival as viable political organizations are: the quality of leadership; the politico-military composition of the rebel group; the economic aspect of the rebellion; the cause, motives, and political programme of the group; and whether the group provides any degree of services, security, and social order in the areas where it operates.

On the first point, almost all Philippine rebel groups grant political formations primacy over their military wing—this should facilitate their transition into non-military organizations. On the economic aspect of the rebellion, Jeremy Weinstein's work on rebel groups is instructive (Weinstein, 2006). He shows that, in the absence of readily available economic resources such as foreign funds or mining revenues, insurgencies engage in violence selectively, since they need the support of local populations to survive. With the exception of the ASG, the main rebel groups in the Philippines fit this categorization. To follow Weinstein's line of argument, since they are resource-deprived, they lack endowments that can be translated into incentives, or payoffs, to motivate individuals to join the rebellion. Instead—*and in this they are similar to political parties*—rebel groups trade on the promise of future improvements in living standards and the collective benefits that the country (Philippines) or nation (Bangsamoro) will reap from a rebel victory. In Weinstein's typology of rebel groups, they are *activist* rather than *opportunistic*, which also bodes well for the post-conflict period (Weinstein, 2006).

Perhaps the biggest hurdle for Philippine armed groups is political leadership. After all, with the notable exception of the ASG and its foreign jihadi allies, such as Jemaah Islamiyyah, all of the surveyed non-state armed groups rely on some level of favourable public or mass opinion and support. The MNLF case study (Chapter 7) tells a tale of relatively successful reintegration of some 7,000 MNLF members into the AFP and PNP but one of failed transformation of the group as a whole. Since the 1996 final peace agreement, the MNLF has neglected to maintain or re-create itself, whether as a politico-military liberation organization, as a political party, or as a civil society movement. Instead, it has splintered again around the issue of the quality of leadership provided by its long-standing chairman, Nur Misuari. He and his close associates have been criticized for selling the movement short by settling as early as 1976 for limited autonomy for the Bangsamoro people and for replicating some of the self-serving practices of the traditional politicians they replaced at the helm of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

The MILF has demonstrated better collective leadership—no doubt helped by lessons learned from the MNLF experience—and even set up a Bangsamoro Leadership and Management Institute for capacity-building. But the group's political leaders are currently being tested over the disciplining of three 'rogue' commanders who attacked civilian communities, violating human rights and international humanitarian law. A worry is that the MILF will fracture, as other Moro rebel groups have in the past, a process that the government has tended to exploit through divide-and-rule tactics.

On the Communist front, too, party splits are endemic. Divisions have centred on the issue of leadership but also on contending Marxist-Leninist(-Maoist) analyses of Philippine society and its political economy, and differing opinions about the need for armed—as opposed to political—struggle. The main, biggest, and most belligerent group on the Communist front is still the CPP-NPA-NDFP, which has reaffirmed, in deed as well as in word, its protracted people's war (PPW). Indeed, the CPP's recent 40th anniversary statement forebodes a higher level of armed revolution as it takes a 'qualitative leap' to the strategic stalemate stage of its PPW. A few of the CPP-NPA-NDFP offshoots also pursue armed struggle, namely, the Partisano group of urban guerrillas and the People's Revolutionary Army (RHB) of the Marxista-Leninistang Partido ng Pilipinas (MLPP). The main 'rejectionist' breakaway factions—RPM-P, RPM-M, and Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino (PMP, Filipino Workers Party)—favour more political forms of struggle, though they retain their arms, mainly for self-defence purposes. The armed wings of the RHB, RPM-P, and RPM-M have all had armed encounters with the NPA, making the fragmentation of rebel groups on the Communist front qualitatively—and not just quantitatively—worse than on the Moro front.

## Mirrors of society and of change

Rebel groups face the challenge of reinventing or renewing themselves ideally before, and more imperatively, after, a negotiated political settlement that might bring them from the realm of non-state to state, with its attendant governance responsibilities. This has proven more difficult than revolution for ex-rebels. The integration of the MNLF into the AFP and PNP—the most successful DDR effort to date—shows the tendency among rebel groups to lose their lustre or even unravel after achieving a final peace agreement or even just a few initial concessions. There should be room for internal reform within rebel groups. In fact, working with armed groups to assist them with internal reforms, such as to ensure respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, is one way to engage constructively with these groups (ICHRP, 2000, pp. 49–51).

This book concurs with the point made in the *Philippine Human Development Report 2005* that, '[i]n a profound sense, all insurgencies hold up a mirror to mainstream society and challenge it to deliver to minority populations and the deprived what it seems to provide adequately to majorities and amply to the socially privileged' (PHDR, 2005, p. 32). By shaping the national agenda, the insurgencies:

> *have helped Filipinos and their government realize how they ought to build a more just, more democratic society. Then it should not be paradoxical if, by engaging in the peace process with its erstwhile challengers and adversaries, Philippine society itself should emerge a better one.* (PHDR, 2005, p. 51)

Yet, if rebel groups purport to be agents of social change for the better, then their own conduct should withstand scrutiny. Even as non-state actors, they must demonstrate a capacity for statesmanship. This is precisely what is demanded now of the MILF as the main standard-bearer on the Moro front. While it continues to stake its fortunes on the peace process, it must be able to rally intra-Moro unity—most critically with the MNLF—and to reach out to the other tri-people of Mindanao, particularly the indigenous Lumad within Moro areas and the mainstream majority Filipino Christian settler population. This would be no mean feat given long-standing anti-Muslim bias in this region.

As indicated earlier, a resolution on the main Communist front will probably have to emerge from outside of the peace process, though not necessarily in the arena of a heightened war. The decisive contention is shaping up to be between two Filipino governments—the established official government and the shadow underground government—competing for the hearts and minds of the Filipino people. Over extensive areas of the countryside, revolutionary organs of political power are opposing the official bodies at the *barangay* (village) level and sometimes also the municipal or town level. The competition will be about who can provide better services, including land reform, security, and social order. It will be affected by the broader political and economic landscape which—like the groups themselves—is shifting. Urbanization and globalization are changing the cities of the still mostly agricultural provinces where the insurgencies are strong. Remittances from overseas and a widening of democratic space for NGOs and leftist political parties provide alternative economic and political avenues for potential recruits—though this panorama could change again given the current financial crisis. The various leftist forces, in particular, have had mixed success in adjusting to this changing socio-economic, political, and military landscape.

Ultimately, therefore, it is the domestic political context that will determine the outcomes of the two main insurgencies. Progress on either front is now unlikely during the current administration until mid-2010. Better prospects for peace rest on the capacity of its successor administration(s) to engage the rebel groups more productively. Another long decade of—not always constructive—engagement appears inevitable. ■

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# APPENDIX

# A Very Long Engagement: A Chronology of Four Decades of the Communist and Moro Insurgencies in the Philippines

## First decade (1968–77)

### Communist

26 December 1968: **Jose Maria Sison** (Amado Guerrero) leads the re-establishment of the **Communist Party of the Philippines** (CPP) as a Maoist party.

1969: ***Philippine Society and Revolution*** (originally *The Philippine Crisis*) written by Sison/Guerrero as the basic textbook or 'Bible' of the CPP-led national-democratic revolution.

29 March 1969: **New People's Army** (NPA) formally founded in Tarlac province, Central Luzon, as the armed force of the CPP , with Bernabe Buscyno (Commander Dante) as Commander-in-Chief.

January–March 1970: **'First Quarter Storm'** (FQS) of CPP-led student demonstrations in the Greater Manila Area against **President Ferdinand Marcos** (1965–86). Subsequent police repression drives recruitment of student activists.

30 December 1970: NPA raid on the armoury of the Philippine Military Academy; defection of First Lieutenant Victor Corpus who would later supervise NPA military training and tactics before returning to AFP.

1–9 February 1971: 'Diliman Commune' set up by student activists who barricade and occupy the main campus of the University of the Philippines to protest and prevent police intrusion.

### Moro/Muslim/Mindanao

18 March 1968: **Jabidah Massacre** of Moro army recruits triggers widespread Filipino Muslim indignation.

1 May 1968: **Muslim (later Mindanao) Independence Movement** (MIM) founded by Datu Udtog Matalam, calling for a separate Islamic 'Republic of Mindanao and Sulu'.

1969: MIM leaders arrange military training in Malaysia for hundreds of young Moros, including **Nur Misuari**, who leads the foundation of the **Moro National Liberation Front** (MNLF).

1970: **Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization** (BMLO) created by Rashid Lucman as an umbrella for all Moro liberation forces.

4 March 1972: Organization of the Islamic Conference (**OIC**) 3rd Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM), Jeddah, issues its first resolution on 'the question of Muslims in the Philippines'.

21 September 1972: Marcos proclaims **martial law**. Moro resistance sparked by efforts to disarm the population.

21 October 1972: 'Marawi Uprising' marks start of the Moro war of liberation; MNLF claims leadership of the Moro secessionist movement.

25 June 1974: OIC 5th ICFM Kuala Lumpur framework resolution for a Government of the

21 August 1971: **Plaza Miranda bombing** of an election rally of the opposition Liberal Party; **suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus**.

July 1972: NPA arms shipment from China on *M/V Karagatan* (Seas) lands at Digoyo Point, Palanan, Isabela—intercepted by AFP before most of the arms could be brought ashore.

21 September 1972: Marcos proclaims **martial law**. CPP and NPA ranks bolstered as many national-democratic student activists flee cities.

24 April 1973: Preparatory Commission formed for the **National Democratic Front of the Philippines** (NDFP), an umbrella formation of the CPP, NPA, and underground national-democratic sectoral mass organizations, all under CPP leadership.

1 December 1974: Sison issues 'Specific Characteristics of Our People's War' based on Mao's strategy of protracted people's war.

October 1975–January 1976: Upsurge in the CPP-led workers' strike movement signaled by the La Tondena strike.

1 July 1976: Sison issues 'Our Urgent Tasks', which stresses painstaking mass work and solid organizational work as requirements for armed revolution.

26 August 1976: NPA Chief 'Dante' Buscayno is captured.

8 November 1977: Sison captured; he is eventually succeeded by **Rodolfo Salas** ('Commander Bilog').

Republic of the Philippines (GRP)-MNLF negotiated political solution, respecting Philippine sovereignty and territorial integrity.

18–29 January 1975: Jeddah Talks between the GRP and MNLF end in a stalemate.

23 December 1976: **Tripoli Agreement** between GRP and MNLF for establishment of 'autonomy for the Muslims in the Southern Philippines,' listing 13 component provinces.

20 January 1977: GRP-MNLF ceasefire implementation agreement, the first ever with a Moro liberation front.

March–April 1977: Breakdown of peace process and ceasefire after Marcos takes unilateral steps to implement the Tripoli Agreement on autonomy in Southern Philippines.

22 May 1977: OIC 8th ICFM recognizes the MNLF as the 'legitimate representative of the Muslim Movement in South Philippines'.

23 December 1977: **Salamat Hashim** leads a Maguindanaon faction forming a 'New MNLF Leadership' (later **Moro Islamic Liberation Front**, MILF).

## Second decade (1978–87)

1980–83: Platoon-sized NPA tactical offensives frequent and widespread; CPP prepares the 'strategic counter-offensive' stage of war.

September 1980: Marcos lifts martial law, but retains dictatorial powers.

30 October–3 November 1980: NDFP and MNLF join forces to present the cases of the Filipino and Bangsa Moro people at the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal Session on the Philippines held in Belgium.

25 July 1979: Presidential Decree No. 1618 organizing **two regional autonomous governments** in **Regions IX** (Western Mindanao) **and XII** (Central Mindanao).

1979–89: Many of the 1,000 Filipino Muslims who participated in the jihad against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan return as mujahideen to Muslim Mindanao.

September 1980: lifting of martial law (see left).

1981: AFP Oplan Katatagan (Toughness) against the NPA; massive redeployment of troops from MNLF to NPA areas.

21 August 1983: **Assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino, Jr.** motivates broad anti-Marcos movement.

1985–86: Large-scale CPP anti-infiltration purges in Mindanao.

May 1985: Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN, New Patriotic Alliance) formed at the CPP's initiative as a 'broad legal alliance' but soon alienates more moderate allies.

3 November 1985: Marcos calls for a snap presidential election on 7 February 1986 under US pressure. The CPP Executive Committee decides to boycott the election, since it does not fit its Maoist PPW strategy.

22–25 February 1986: **EDSA People Power Revolution** ousting Marcos and installing **President Corazon Aquino** (1986–92).

March 1986: Sison and Buscayno are among political prisoners released by Aquino despite military objections.

April 1986: Salas resigns as CPP Chairman and is succeeded by Vice-Chairman **Benito Tiamzon** as Acting Chairman. AFP adopts a more people-oriented Oplan Mamamayan (Citizenry) strategy against the NPA.

17 April 1986: **Conrado Balweg** establishes **Cordillera People's Liberation Army** (CPLA).

August 1986–February 1987: First GRP-NDFP peace negotiations collapse over their widely divergent frameworks and the Mendiola Massacre of CPP-led peasant demonstrators on 22 January 1987.

13 September 1986: Mt. Data Accord on a ceasefire between the New AFP and CPLA.

22 October 1986: Sison leaves for exile eventually in The Netherlands.

2 February 1987: **New Constitution** includes provisions for autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao and in the Cordilleras.

30 October–3 November 1980: NDFP and MNLF make joint presentation (see left).

1981: MILF main Camp Abubakar firmly established.

10 June 1982: **MNLF–Reformist Group** (RG), led by **Dimas Pundato**, splits from the MNLF rejecting Misuari's leadership and accepting autonomy under the Tripoli Agreement.

1984: *MNLF Guidelines: For Political Cadres and Military Commanders* published, based on extracts from Misuari's speeches, interviews, and writings.

March 1984: **MILF** officially distinguishes itself from the MNLF, with **Salamat Hashim** as founding Chairman.

January 1985: *The Bangsamoro Mujahid: His Objectives and Responsibilities* by Hashim published as the MILF guidebook.

22–25 February 1986: **EDSA People Power Revolution** (see left).

5 September 1986: Aquino offers a gesture of peace by meeting Misuari in the MNLF home ground of Jolo.

4 January 1986: **Jeddah Accord** between the GRP and MNLF to 'continue discussion of the proposal for the grant of full autonomy to [23 provinces of] Mindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan subject to democratic processes'.

13–17 January 1987: **'Five-Day War'** by the MILF in its first major show of force in protest against the 'cheap drama' of the Jeddah Accord.

2 February 1987: **New Constitution** includes provisions for autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao and in the Cordilleras. Aquino rejects MNLF proposals to suspend these provisions.

February–May 1987: Failed domestic GRP-MNLF peace negotiations on autonomy, without OIC participation.

March 1987: Aquino bows to AFP pressure to unleash 'total war' against the NPA.

May 1987: CPP-led forces participate (unsuccessfully) in congressional elections through Partido ng Bayan (PnB, Party of the People).

28 August 1987: First major military coup attempt.

1987: Sison reassumes CPP Chairmanship; NPA reaches peak strength of 25,200 according to the AFP (CPP says NPA peak strength was only 6,100).

## Third decade (1988–97)

1988: Start of sudden decline of the revolutionary forces throughout the country.

September 1988–95: AFP's Oplan Lambat Bitag (Catch Net) strategy of 'gradual constriction' is successful in drastically reducing NPA strength.

1989–96: NPA armed city partisan ('Sparrow unit') assassinations of police officers, US military personnel, and private individuals in Metro Manila and other urban centres.

1–9 December 1989: Second major military coup attempt.

1990: CPP scraps the 'strategic counter-offensive' (SCO) program for its protracted people's war.

Early 1991: Sison 'put[s] himself back in command' of the CPP.

16 September 1991: Philippine Senate rejection of US military bases in the country leads to unilateral ceasefire by the NDFP.

26 December 1991: **'Great Schism'** in the CPP between 'reaffirmists' (RA) and 'rejectionists' (RJ) of the Maoist protracted people's war strategy. NPA redeployed to focus on mass work and only secondarily on military work.

July 1992–July 1993: **President Fidel Ramos** (1992–98) takes office, launches **nationwide consultation** (including with rebel groups), resulting in the 'Six Paths to Peace' framework, subsequently incorporated into Executive Order (EO) No. 125.

Mid-1989: Founding of Al-Harakatul Al-Islamiyya (Islamic Movement, aka **Abu Sayyaf Group**) by **Abdurajak Janjalani** and other MNLF cadres.

1 August 1989: Republic Act (RA) No. 6734, the first Organic Act for the ARMM. In the ensuing plebiscite only four (of a projected 13) provinces vote to join the ARMM.

10 August 1991: ASG bombs the M/V *Doulous* foreign Christian missionary ship in Zamboanga City.

11 December 1991: OIC 6th Islamic Summit Dakar resolution first mentions the MILF alongside the MNLF.

July 1992–July 1993: nationwide consultation (see left).

October 1992–August 1996: Third and final round of GRP-MNLF peace negotiations; Interim Ceasefire Agreement reached on 7 November 1993.

3 May 1993: Battle of Al-Madinah, the ASG's first major engagement with the AFP.

4 April 1995: Raid on Ipil, Zamboanga peninsula by a composite of anti-Misuari forces, comprising the ASG and various breakaway factions and 'lost commands' of the MNLF that were disgruntled with the peace talks.

2 September 1996: **Final Peace Agreement** (FPA, 'Jakarta Accord') between the GRP and MNLF, considered the full implementation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement.

1992: Amnesty proclamations and repeal of the Anti-Subversion Law legalize CPP membership.

1 September 1992: GRP and NDFP agree on **Hague Joint Declaration** framework agreement for peace negotiations, but without an interim ceasefire.

1992–95: NPA strength and tactical offensives continue to decline.

1995: The AFP shifts its focus to external defence and the Moro front, turning over counter-insurgency against the NPA to the Philippine National Police (PNP).

1996: Steady increase in NPA strength, firepower, and number of guerrilla fronts.

9 September 1996: ARMM elections; Misuari elected unopposed as Regional Governor.

2 October 1996: Executive Order No. 371 creating a Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD) and Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) to implement the transitional period (Phase 1) under the FPA.

3–5 December 1996: 1 million people reportedly attend First Bangsamoro People's Consultative Assembly (BPCA) in support of independence.

7 January 1997: Beginning of domestic 'low-level' peace negotiations between the GRP and MILF.

18 July 1997: GRP-MILF Agreement for General Cessation of Hostilities.

## Fourth decade (1998–2008)

16 March 1998: Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (**CARHRIHL**) between GRP and NDFP.

1 May 1998: Foundation of breakaway group Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas (**RPM-P**, Revolutionary Workers Party of the Philippines), with founding leaders **Arturo Tabara** and **Nilo de la Cruz**.

May 1998: Akbayan! Citizens Action Party—which includes some CPP-NPA-NDFP breakaway groups—participates successfully in the first party-list elections for the House of Representatives.

February 1999: GRP suspends peace negotiations after NPA take AFP General 'prisoner of war'.

April 1999: Foundation of breakaway group Marxista-Leninistang Partido ng Pilipinas (**MLPP**, Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines), with **Caridad Magpantay** among its founding leaders.

May 1999: NDFP suspends peace negotiations after GRP ratifies the Visiting Forces Agreement with US.

18 December 1998: Police kill ASG founder Abdurajak Janjalani in Basilan; his youngest brother **Khadaffy Janjalani** takes over as amir.

24 July 1999: Limited tactical alliance between NDFP and MILF.

25 October 1999: GRP-MILF Formal Peace Talks begin.

14 December 1999: United Coordinating Council of MNLF (without Misuari) and MILF established.

16 March 2000: Surge in hostilities in Lanao del Norte in response to Estrada's 'all-out war' against MILF.

20 March and 23 April 2000. ASG-perpetrated Basilan and Sipadan hostage crises.

28 April 2000: AFP move to take 46 identified MILF camps results in **largest scale AFP-MILF hostilities** to date.

30 June 2000: OIC 27th ICFM Kuala Lumpur resolution urging GRP and MILF to immediately halt hostilities and reach a peaceful solution to the problem in Mindanao.

24 July 1999: Limited tactical alliance between NDFP and MILF.

31 December 1999: CPLA Chairman Balweg assassinated by the NPA.

2000: Impeachment proceedings against **President Joseph Ejercito Estrada** (1998–2001).

6 December 2000: Peace Agreement between the GRP and the RPM-P.

16–20 January 2001: NDFP involved in **EDSA II** protests which lead to ouster of Estrada;

**Vice-President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo** (2001–10) takes over as President.

6 February 2001: Assassination of former Manila-Rizal Regional Party Committee Secretary (leader) Filemon Lagman—RPM-P suspected.

28 February 2001: **Executive Order No. 3** (reiterating EO 125) signals 'all-out peace' policy in reversal of Estrada's 'all-out war' policy.

1 May 2001: Foundation of Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagagawa ng Mindanao (**RPM-M**, Revolutionary Workers Party of Mindanao), after splitting from RPM-P. Its most prominent founding leader is **Ike de los Reyes**.

May 2001: National-democratic Bayan Muna (People First) participates successfully in the second party-list elections.

January 2002: Start of five-year AFP Internal Security Operations Campaign Plan Bantay-Laya (Guard Freedom).

5 August 2002: Formation of Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino (**PMP**, Filipino Workers Party), associated with the late **Filemon Lagman**.

August–October 2002: CPP, NPA, and Sison included in the 'terrorist' blacklists of the US, The Netherlands, UK, Canada, Australia, and European Union. Arroyo orders AFP to re-deploy its troops to NPA areas. Sison calls for 'all-out resistance'.

8 July 2000: AFP takes MILF main Camp Abubakar.

12 July 2000: Hashim declares all-out jihad against GRP and AFP; **MILF shifts from semi-conventional to guerrilla warfare.**

30 December 2000: Rizal Day terrorist bombing of Manila light railway, attributed to an Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) senior operative and an MILF special operations group leader.

2001: Local jihadi group **Rajah Solaiman Movement** (RSM) founded in main island region of Luzon.

28 February 2001: 'All-out peace' policy under Executive Order No. 3 (see left).

24 March 2001: Kuala Lumpur Agreement on the General Framework for the Resumption of the GRP-MILF Peace Talks.

31 March 2001: Adoption of Republic Act No. 9054, the **second Organic Act for the ARMM**; MNLF contends it is not faithful to the FPA on certain provisions.

28 April 2001: Creation of Executive Council of 15 (EC-15) MNLF faction led by **Parouk Hussin, Hatimil Hassan, and Muslimin Sema**.

27 May 2001: US citizens among hostages taken by ASG in Dos Palmas.

1–3 June 2001: 2.6 million attend the Second Bangsamoro People's Consultative Assembly (BPCA).

22 June 2001: **Tripoli Agreement on Peace** between the **GRP and MILF**.

14 August 2001: Plebiscite on RA 9054 (boycotted by Misuari's mainstream MNLF) brings coverage of ARMM to 5 provinces and 1 city.

November 2001: ARMM elections; MNLF EC-15 leader Parouk Hussin elected Regional Governor; pro-Misuari MNLF forces revolt in Zamboanga City and Sulu and are crushed by the AFP; Misuari flees to Sabah where he is arrested by Malaysian authorities.

23 January 2003: NPA assassinates its former Chief Romulo Kintanar.

28 July 2003: Oakwood Mutiny by a new generation of military rebels.

10–14 February 2004: GRP-NDFP Formal Peace Talks resume in Oslo.

May 2004: **Arroyo** elected as President under suspicion of electoral fraud.

August 2004: NDFP suspends formal peace talks in protest at GRP failing to pressure to have the CPP, NPA, and Sison removed from the foreign terrorist blacklists.

26 September 2004: NPA assassinates RPM-P Chairman Arturo Tabara.

28 October 2005: Ceasefire agreement between the GRP and RPM-M.

24 February 2006: Arroyo declares a state of national emergency after an attempted military coup and anti-Arroyo protest rallies. Alliance between new military rebels and the CPP-NPA.

29 May 2006: Former Bicol Regional Party Committee Secretary **Sotero Llamas** (no longer active in the CPP) assassinated—AFP suspected.

June 2006: Arroyo calls on the AFP to crush the NPA in two years.

2007: AFP Internal Security Operations Campaign Plan Bantay-Laya 2.

7–20 February 2007: UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions finds that AFP elements are implicated in most killings of leftist activists since 2001.

May 2007: Mid-term elections with backlash against Arroyo administration senatorial candidates.

28 August 2007: **Sison arrested** in Utrecht on charges of ordering the killings of Kintanar and Tabara, is eventually released for lack of evidence directly linking him.

29 November 2007: Manila Peninsula Incident involves an AFP siege of this hotel to flush out

January 2002: Misuari repatriated to the Philippines and detained for rebellion.

January–June 2002: First **joint US-Philippine** *Balikatan* (shoulder-to-shoulder) **military exercises** in Basilan **targeting the ASG**.

6–9 May 2002: GRP-MILF Joint Communique on interdiction of criminal syndicates and kidnap-for-ransom groups.

11 February 2003: AFP 'Buliok offensive' against Hashim's Islamic Center headquarters.

4 March and 2 April 2003: MILF leaders charged with involvement in Davao airport and wharf bombings; escalation of hostilities.

20 June 2003: Hashim (and MILF) rejects terrorism.

13 July 2003: Hashim dies of natural causes; Ahod Ibrahim (**Al Haj Murad Ebrahim**) takes over as MILF Chairman.

19 July 2003: Ceasefire between GRP and MILF.

27 February 2004: Superferry 14 bombing by ASG, RSM, and JI.

7–17 February 2005: First post-1996 FPA **major hostilities between the AFP and MNLF Misuari forces in Sulu**.

14 February 2005: Valentine Day's bombings in Manila and two Mindanao cities by ASG, RSM, and JI.

29–31 May 2005: 4 million people reportedly participate in an MILF consultation giving the MILF the mandate to negotiate a political settlement with GRP.

26 October 2005: RSM leader Ahmad Santos detained.

2005–July 2008: Ancestral domain negotiations between GRP and MILF; initialled final draft of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) scheduled for signing on 5 August 2008 in Putrajaya, Malaysia.

August 2006–April 2007: Khadaffy Janjalani and Abu Solaiman killed in 'Oplan Ultimatum' major military offensive against ASG in Sulu.

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| new military rebels, who call in vain for military withdrawal of support from and people power against Arroyo.<br>25 April 2008: 'Joint Declaration of Commitment of the GRP and Cordillera Bodong Administration (CBA)-CPLA Toward the Completion of the 1986 Mount Data Peace Accord'. CPLA leadership unified under Mailed Molina.<br>26 December 2008: **40th anniversary of the CPP**, which plans a 'qualitative leap' to the 'strategic stalemate' stage of its war and claims a membership of tens of thousands and a rural mass base of millions. | 10–12 November 2007: First Tripartite Meeting of the GRP, MNLF, and OIC to review the implementation of the 1996 FPA.<br>1–3 April 2008: **MNLF Central Committee reconvened** under a new leadership old guards with **Muslimin Sema** as Chairman.<br>28 April 2008: Misuari released on bail from house arrest.<br>8–17 June 2008: ASG kidnapping of television crew in Sulu signals its return to kidnapping for ransom.<br>4 August 2008: **Supreme Court temporary restraining order against the signing of the GRP-MILF MOA-AD** triggers attacks (and AFP counterattacks) by three 'rogue' MILF base commanders against Christian civilian communities in Central Mindanao.<br>14 October 2008: Supreme Court Decision declaring the unsigned MOA-AD as 'contrary to law and the Constitution'. |